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HAMLET

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HAMLET

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HAMLET
Prince of Denmark

THE TRAGEDY OF

HAMLET

PRINCE OF DENMARK

By

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Edited with *explanatory* and *interpretive notes*
and a *commentary* by JOSEPH QUINCY ADAMS
Professor of English in CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

In this edition of *Hamlet* I have made an effort to subordinate external details, with which too often annotated texts of the master have been burdened, and to stress the dramatic and artistic qualities of the play — the things with which Shakespeare most concerned himself, and upon which, we may well believe, he would like for us to place our emphasis. To this end, explanatory notes have been reduced to a minimum, and inconspicuously set at the foot of the page; and discussions of sources, dates, texts, stage-history, and the like have been relegated to an Appendix, where they can be more profitably read after the play itself has been mastered.

As a result of a thorough, and, I believe, a fruitful study of the two quarto and of the First Folio editions of *Hamlet*, I have been led to construct a new text of the play, with the aim of supplying the nearest possible approach to what Shakespeare wrote in his complete and final version. For reasons set forth at large in the Appendix, I have adopted the Folio as the basic text; but I have had to make much allowance for the wretched work of the Folio typesetter, for frequent "cuts" inevitable in every Elizabethan stage-manuscript — since the Folio was printed from the actors' prompt-book — and for occasional minor alterations inspired by the Government censor. In prosecuting this delicate task of revising and expanding the corrupt and abbreviated Folio text, I have taken advantage of the much

better printed Second Quarto, and, when possible, have checked conclusions by the pirated First Quarto. I have not, however, deemed it wise to burden the footnotes with textual problems, almost endless in number. Such matters can be intelligently handled only by an expert; and the student should be concerned with them only in a formal and advanced course in textual criticism.

Besides providing a new text, I have labored hard to supply a punctuation that may aid the reader in a dramatic interpretation of the lines. Here I have availed myself, in so far as that was possible, of the actors' punctuation as represented in the Folio; for often that punctuation nicely reveals the way in which a speech was delivered. And, when necessity seemed to dictate, I have added stage-directions in order to enable those whose imaginations are unschooled in the usages of the theatre — especially of the Elizabethan theatre — to visualize the action that takes place on the stage.

An interpretation of the characters and of the plot has been incorporated in a running Commentary, designed to be read in connection with each scene. I dare not hope that the interpretation here advanced of Hamlet and of his strange behavior will win approval from every reader; for no problem in literature has evoked more discussion, or led to so many conflicting answers. My task has been to make a logical and consistent interpretation of the play, based on my own study of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and on the writings of the ablest commentators. And since this interpretation has emerged after long mental incubation accompanying years of teaching, I am for the most part

unable now to point out the exact source of particular ideas, or, it may be, of occasional verbal borrowings. My greatest debt, however — and inevitably so — is to Professor A. C. Bradley's stimulating discussion of the play, in his *Shakespearean Tragedy*. I have not been able to follow his lead entirely; yet his interpretation of the young Prince — itself largely a synthesis of earlier interpretations — has been my chief inspiration, and I gratefully acknowledge a heavy obligation to him. Finally, to Professors Lane Cooper, Robert Morris Ogden, and William Strunk, I am indebted for a careful reading of parts of my manuscript. They are, of course, in no way responsible for the errors of judgment or infelicities of expression with which I may be charged; yet my work, I know, is much the better for their kindly criticism.

JOSEPH QUINCY ADAMS

CONTENTS

PREFACE	v
TEXT	5
COMMENTARY	171
SOURCES AND HISTORY OF THE PLAY	335

HAMLET
Prince of Denmark

HAMLET
PRINCE OF DENMARK

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HAMLET, *only son of the murdered King Hamlet.*

CLAUDIUS, *brother of the murdered king; usurper of the throne.*

GERTRUDE, *widow of the murdered king; now wife of Claudius.*

GHOST *of the murdered king.*

POLONIUS, *Lord High Chamberlain.*

LAERTES, *son to Polonius.*

OPHELIA, *daughter to Polonius; beloved by Prince Hamlet.*

HORATIO, *loyal friend to Prince Hamlet.*

ROSENCRANTZ,
GUILDENSTERN, } *false friends to Prince Hamlet.*

OSRIC, *a foolish courtier.*

FORTINBRAS, *Prince of Norway.*

VOLTIMAND,
CORNELIUS, } *Ambassadors to Norway.*

MARCELLUS,
BERNADO,
FRANCISCO, } *sentinels.*

REYNALDO, *servant to Polonius.*

TWO GRAVE-DIGGERS.

TROUPE OF CITY PLAYERS, *on tour.*

Lords, Ladies, Ambassadors, Priests, Captain, Soldiers, Sailors, a Mob of Danes, Messengers, and Attendants.

THE SCENE — ELSINORE.

HAMLET
PRINCE OF DENMARK

ACT I

SCENE I. *Midnight. The sentinel's platform before the royal castle.*

FRANCISCO, *a sentinel, with lantern in hand and partisan on shoulder, pacing back and forth. The clock in the castle slowly beats the hour of twelve. Upon the last stroke,* BERNARDO, *the relief-sentinel, enters, with lantern and partisan.*

BERNARDO. Who's there?

FRANCISCO. Nay, answer me. Stand, and unfold yourself!

BERNARDO. "Long live the king."[1]

FRANCISCO. [*Lifting his lantern.*] Bernardo?

BERNARDO. He.

FRANCISCO. You come most carefully upon your hour.

BERNARDO. 'Tis now struck twelve. Get thee to bed, Francisco.

FRANCISCO. For this relief much thanks. 'Tis bitter cold;
And I am sick at heart.

BERNARDO. Have you had quiet guard?

FRANCISCO. Not a mouse stirring.

BERNARDO. Well, good-night.
[*As* FRANCISCO *reaches the door,* BERNARDO *calls after him.*]
If you do meet Horatio and Marcellus,

[1] "*Long . . . king*": apparently the watchword.

The rivals[1] of my watch, bid them make haste.

FRANCISCO. I think I hear them.

Enter MARCELLUS, *a soldier, accompanied by* HORATIO, *a young gentleman in civilian garb.* FRANCISCO *halts them with the sentinel's challenge.*

Stand, ho! [*Lifts his lantern.*] Who's there?

HORATIO. Friends to this ground.

MARCELLUS. And liegemen to the Dane.

FRANCISCO. Give you good-night.

MARCELLUS. [*Recognizing him.*] O! — Farewell, honest soldier.
Who hath reliev'd you?

FRANCISCO. Bernardo hath my place.
Give you good-night. [*Exit.*

MARCELLUS. [*Advancing.*] Holla? — Bernardo?

BERNARDO. [*Lifting his lantern.*] Say,
What! is Horatio there?

HORATIO. A piece of him.

BERNARDO. Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, good Marcellus.

MARCELLUS. What! has this thing appear'd again to-night?

BERNARDO. I have seen nothing.

MARCELLUS. Horatio says 'tis but our fantasy,
And will not let belief take hold of him
Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us:
Therefore I have entreated him along
With us to watch the minutes of this night,
That if again this apparition come
He may approve[2] our eyes, and speak to it.

[1] *rivals*: partners. [2] *approve*: corroborate.

HORATIO. Tush! tush! 'Twill not appear!
BERNARDO. Sit down awhile,
And let us once again assail your ears,
That are so fortified against our story,
What we, two nights, have seen.
HORATIO. Well, sit we down,
And let us hear Bernardo speak of this.
[*They seat themselves.*
BERNARDO. Last night of all,
When yond same star, that's westward from the pole,[1]
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,
The bell then beating one, —
MARCELLUS. [*Grasping his arm.*] Peace! Break thee off! Look, where it comes again!
Enter Ghost.
BERNARDO. [*Whispering.*] In the same figure, like the king that's dead.
MARCELLUS. [*Whispering.*] Thou art a scholar;[2] speak to it, Horatio.
BERNARDO. Looks it not like the king — mark it! — Horatio?
HORATIO. Most like. It harrows me with fear and wonder.
BERNARDO. It would be spoke to.[3]
MARCELLUS. Question it, Horatio.
HORATIO. [*Rising.*] What art thou that usurp'st this time of night,

[1] *pole*: the North or Pole star.
[2] *scholar*: Ghosts were exorcised in Latin.
[3] *would be spoke to*: the popular belief was that a ghost could not speak unless first spoken to.

Together with that fair and warlike form
In which the majesty of buried Denmark
Did sometimes march? By heaven I charge thee, speak!

MARCELLUS. It is offended.

BERNARDO. See, it stalks away.

HORATIO. Stay! Speak! Speak! I charge thee, speak!
[*Exit Ghost.*

MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone, and will not answer.

BERNARDO. How now, Horatio! You tremble and look pale!
Is not this something more than fantasy?
What think you on't?

HORATIO. Before my God! I might not this believe
Without the sensible and true avouch
Of mine own eyes!

MARCELLUS. Is it not like the king?

HORATIO. As thou art to thyself!
Such was the very armour he had on
When he the ambitious Norway combated.
So frown'd he once, when in an angry parle[1]
He smote the sledded Polack[2] on the ice.
'Tis strange!

MARCELLUS. Thus twice before, and jump[3] at this dead hour,
With martial stalk hath he gone by our watch.

HORATIO. In what particular thought to work I know not;
But in the gross and scope of my opinion,

[1] *parle*: conference.
[2] *Polack*: the King of Poland; the elder Hamlet, angered in the conference, probably struck him with his glove or hand.
[3] *jump*: exactly.

This bodes some strange eruption[1] to our state.
MARCELLUS. Good now, sit down; and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch
So nightly toils[2] the subject of the land;
And why such daily cast of brazen cannon,
And foreign mart[3] for implements of war;
Why such impress[4] of shipwrights, whose sore task
Does not divide the Sunday from the week.
What might be toward[5] that this sweaty haste
Doth make the night joint-labourer with the day?
Who is't that can inform me?
HORATIO. That can I;
At least, the whisper goes so. Our last king —
Whose image even but now appear'd to us —
Was, as you know, by Fortinbras of Norway,
Thereto prick'd on by a most emulate pride,
Dar'd to the combat; in which our valiant Hamlet —
For so this side of our known world esteem'd him —
Did slay this Fortinbras; who, by a seal'd compact,
Well ratified by law and heraldry,[6]
Did forfeit, with his life, all those his lands
Which he stood seiz'd of to the conqueror;
Against the which a moiety competent[7]
Was gaged by our king, which had return'd
To the inheritance of Fortinbras

[1] *eruption*: sudden calamity. [2] *toils*: fatigues.
[3] *mart*: purchase. [4] *impress*: impressment, enforced service.
[5] *toward*: imminent.
[6] *by law and heraldry*: by the formalities of civil law (with bonds, signatures, and seals), and by the Heraldic Court which governed matters of chivalry.
[7] *moiety competent*: equivalent portion (of land).

Had he been vanquisher, as, by the same covenant
And carriage[1] of the article design'd,
His fell to Hamlet. Now, sir, young Fortinbras,
Of unimproved mettle[2] hot and full,
Hath in the skirts of Norway here and there
Shark'd up[3] a list of lawless resolutes,
For food and diet,[4] to some enterprise
That hath a stomach[5] in't; which is no other,
As it doth well appear unto our state,[6]
But to recover of us, by strong hand
And terms compulsative, those foresaid lands
So by his father lost. And this, I take it,
Is the main motive of our preparations,
The source of this our watch, and the chief head
Of this post-haste and romage[7] in the land.

BERNARDO. I think it be no other but e'en so.
Well may it sort[8] that this portentous figure
Comes armed through our watch, so like the king
That was, and is, the question of these wars.

HORATIO. A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.
In the most high and palmy state of Rome,
A little ere the mightiest Julius fell,
The graves stood tenantless, and the sheeted dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets;
As stars with trains of fire,[9] and dews of blood,

[1] *carriage*: specified terms as carried by the signed document.
[2] *unimproved mettle*: unreproved courage.
[3] *Shark'd up*: collected without discrimination.
[4] *for food and diet*: without other pay than their keep.
[5] *stomach*: courage (suggested by "food and diet").
[6] *state*: government.
[7] *romage*: bustle.
[8] *well may it sort*: it may well be on this account.
[9] *stars with trains of fire*: meteors. Apparently a line has been lost here.

Disasters in the sun; and the moist star[1]
Upon whose influence Neptune's empire stands
Was sick almost to doomsday with eclipse.
And even the like precurse of fierce events —
As harbingers preceding still[2] the fates
And prologue to the omen coming on —
Have heaven and earth together demonstrated
Unto our climatures and countrymen.

Re-enter the Ghost.

But, soft! Behold! Lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it,[3] though it blast me.

[HORATIO *steps into the path of the Ghost and bars its way.*

Stay, illusion!
If thou hast any sound, or use of voice,
Speak to me!
If there be any good thing to be done,
That may to thee do ease and grace to me,
Speak to me!
If thou art privy to thy country's fate,
Which happily foreknowing may avoid,
O, speak!
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life
Extorted treasure in the womb of earth —
For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death —
Speak of it!

[*The Ghost raises its arms and starts to speak; but instantly the cock crows, and the Ghost, frightened, drops its arms, and hurries away.*

Stay, and speak! — Stop it, Marcellus.

[1] *moist star*: the moon. [2] *still*: invariably.
[3] *I'll cross it*: to step into the path of a ghost was supposed to invite disaster.

MARCELLUS. Shall I strike at it with my partisan?[1]
HORATIO. Do, if it will not stand.
BERNARDO. [*Striking.*] 'Tis here!
HORATIO. [*Striking.*] 'Tis here! [*Exit Ghost.*
MARCELLUS. 'Tis gone!
We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence;
For it is, as the air, invulnerable,
And our vain blows malicious mockery.
BERNARDO. It was about to speak when the cock crew.
HORATIO. And then it started, like a guilty thing
Upon a fearful summons. I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day; and at his warning,
Whether in sea or fire, in earth or air,
The extravagant and erring[2] spirit hies
To his confine; and of the truth herein
This present object made probation.
MARCELLUS. It faded on the crowing of the cock.
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit dare walk abroad,
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,[3]
No fairy takes,[4] nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time.
HORATIO. So have I heard, and do in part believe it.
But, look! the morn in russet mantle clad

[1] *partisan*: a pike or halbert.
[2] *extravagant and erring*: wandering and roaming.
[3] *strike*: exercise a malign influence.
[4] *takes*: does mischief.

Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill.
Break we our watch up. And by my advice
Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.
Do you consent we shall acquaint him with it,
As needful in our loves, fitting our duty?

MARCELLUS. Let's do't, I pray. And I this morning know
Where we shall find him most conveniently. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *The following morning. A room of state in the castle.*

A flourish of trumpets. Enter KING CLAUDIUS, QUEEN GERTRUDE, PRINCE HAMLET, POLONIUS, LAERTES, CORNELIUS, VOLTIMAND, *Lords*, *Ladies*, *Attendants*. *The* KING *and* QUEEN *take their places on the throne.*

KING. Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
The memory be green, and that it us befitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe,
Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
That we with wisest sorrow think on him,
Together with remembrance of ourselves.
Therefore, our sometime sister, now our queen,
The imperial jointress[1] of this warlike state,
Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
With one auspicious[2] and one dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole,

[1] *jointress*: a widow who holds a joint tenancy.
[2] *auspicious*: betokening joy.

Taken to wife. [*Turning to the assembled Lords.*] Nor have
we herein barr'd
Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
With this affair along. For all, our thanks.
Now follows that you know: young Fortinbras,
Holding a weak supposal of our worth,
Or thinking by our late dear brother's death
Our state[1] to be disjoint and out of frame,
Colleagued[2] with the dream of his advantage,
He hath not fail'd to pester us with message
Importing the surrender of those lands
Lost by his father, with all bands of law,
To our most valiant brother. So much for him.
Now for ourself, and for this time of meeting;
Thus much the business is: we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras —
Who, impotent and bed-rid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose — to suppress
His further gait[3] herein, in that the levies,
The lists, and full proportions,[4] are all made
Out of his subject. And we here dispatch
You, good Cornelius, and you, Voltimand,
For bearers of this greeting to old Norway,
Giving to you no further personal power
To business with the king more than the scope
Of these delated[5] articles allow. [*Hands them papers.*
Farewell, and let your haste commend your duty.

CORNELIUS. } In that, and all things, will we show our
VOLTIMAND. } duty.

[1] *state*: government.
[2] *Colleagued*: allied.
[3] *gait*: procedure.
[4] *proportions*: numbers (of soldiers).
[5] *delated*: set forth in full.

KING. We doubt it nothing. Heartily farewell.

[*Exeunt* CORNELIUS *and* VOLTIMAND.

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit; what is't, Laertes?
You cannot speak of reason to the Dane,
And lose your voice. What wouldst thou beg, Laertes,
That shall not be my offer, not thy asking?
The head is not more native to the heart,
The hand more instrumental to the mouth,
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.
What wouldst thou have, Laertes?

LAERTES. Dread my lord,
Your leave and favour to return to France;
From whence though willingly I came to Denmark
To show my duty in your coronation,[1]
Yet now, I must confess, that duty done,
My thoughts and wishes bend again toward France,
And bow them to your gracious leave and pardon.[2]

KING. Have you your father's leave? What says Polonius?

POLONIUS. He hath, my lord, wrung from me my slow leave
By laboursome petition; and at last
Upon his will I seal'd my hard consent.
I do beseech you, give him leave to go.

KING. Take thy fair hour, Laertes. Time be thine,
And thy best graces spend it at thy will.

[LAERTES *withdraws*. *The* KING *turns to* HAMLET.

[1] *coronation*: it should be noted that Horatio came to attend the funeral of the old king, Laertes to attend the coronation of the new.

[2] *pardon*: permission to depart.

But now, my cousin[1] Hamlet, and my son, —

HAMLET. [*Aside.*] A little more than kin, and less than kind.[2]

KING. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

HAMLET. Not so, my lord; I am too much i' the sun.[3]

QUEEN. Good Hamlet, cast thy nighted colour off,
And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark.
Do not for ever with thy vailed lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know'st 'tis common; all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

HAMLET. Ay, madam, it is — "common."

QUEEN. If it be,
Why seems it so particular with thee?

HAMLET. "Seems," madam! Nay, it is. I know not "seems."
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected haviour of the visage,
Together with all forms, modes, shows of grief,
That can denote me truly; these indeed "seem,"
For they are actions that a man might play:
But I have that within which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

KING. 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.

[1] *cousin*: near kinsman; here, nephew.
[2] *kind*: in accordance with nature.
[3] *i' the sun*: a pun on "sonship," and the "sunshine of royal attention."

But, you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious[1] sorrow: but to persever
In obstinate condolement is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief.
It shows a will most incorrect to heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
An understanding simple and unschool'd:[2]
For, what we know must be, and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we, in our peevish[3] opposition,
Take it to heart? Fie! 'Tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd, whose common theme
Is "death of fathers," and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died to-day,
"This must be so." We pray you, throw to earth
This unprevailing woe; and think of us
As of a father. For — let the world take note! —
You are the most immediate[4] to our throne;
And with no less nobility of love
Than that which dearest father bears his son
Do I impart[5] toward you. For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg,
It is most retrograde[6] to our desire!
And, we beseech you, bend you[7] to remain

[1] *obsequious*: proper to obsequies.
[2] *unschool'd*: undisciplined.
[3] *peevish*: silly, foolish.
[4] *immediate*: closest (in influence and power; also as successor).
[5] *impart*: give a share (of royal power).
[6] *retrograde*: diametrically opposed.
[7] *bend you*: make yourself yield.

Here, in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and — our son.

QUEEN. Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet:
I pray thee, stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET. I shall in all my best obey you, madam.

KING. Why, 'tis a loving and a fair reply!
Be as ourself in Denmark. Madam, come;
This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet
Sits smiling to my heart; in grace whereof,
No jocund health that Denmark drinks to-day,
But the great cannon to the clouds shall tell,
And the king's rouse[1] the heavens shall bruit[2] again,
Re-speaking earthly thunder. Come; away.

[*Exeunt all except* HAMLET.

HAMLET. O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon[3] 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!
How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses[4] of this world!
Fie on't! O fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.[5] — That it should come to this!
But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two!
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr! so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem[6] the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. — Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? — Why, she would hang on him

[1] *rouse*: a full draught of liquor. [2] *bruit*: noise, report.
[3] *canon*: law. [4] *uses*: customary practices or employments.
[5] *merely*: absolutely, completely. [6] *beteem*: permit.

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on; and yet, within a month —
Let me not think on't! —— Frailty, thy name is "woman."
A little month! or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears; why she, even she! —
O God! a beast, that wants discourse of reason,[1]
Would have mourn'd longer — married with mine uncle,
My father's brother! — but no more like my father
Than I to Hercules. —— Within a month!
Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
Had left the flushing in her galled[2] eyes,
She married. O, most wicked speed, to post
With such dexterity[3] to incestuous sheets!
It is not nor it cannot come to good!
But break my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

Enter HORATIO *with the two sentinels* MARCELLUS *and* BERNARDO.

HORATIO. Hail to your lordship!

HAMLET. I am glad to see you well —
Horatio! or I do forget myself.

HORATIO. The same, my lord, and your poor servant ever.

HAMLET. Sir, my good friend. I'll change that name with you.
And what make you from Wittenberg, Horatio? —
Marcellus?

[1] *discourse of reason*: faculty of reasoning.
[2] *galled*: sore (from weeping).
[3] *dexterity*: quickness of contrivance, adroitness.

MARCELLUS. My good lord.
HAMLET. I am very glad to see you. [*To* BERNARDO.]
Good even, sir. —
But what, in faith, make you from Wittenberg?
HORATIO. A truant disposition, good my lord.
HAMLET. I would not hear your enemy say so;
Nor shall you do mine ear that violence
To make it truster[1] of your own report
Against yourself; I know you are no truant.
But what is your affair in Elsinore?
We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart!
HORATIO. My lord, I came to see your father's funeral.
HAMLET. I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student;
I think it was to see —— my mother's wedding.
HORATIO. Indeed, my lord, it follow'd hard upon.
HAMLET. Thrift, thrift, Horatio! the funeral bak'd meats[2]
Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables.
Would I had met my dearest[3] foe in heaven
Ere I had ever seen that day, Horatio!
My father, methinks I see my father —
HORATIO. O, where, my lord?
HAMLET. In my mind's eye, Horatio.
HORATIO. I saw him —— once. He was a goodly king.
HAMLET. He was a man! Take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.
HORATIO. My lord, I think I saw him yesternight.
HAMLET. Saw? Who?
HORATIO. My lord, the king your father.

[1] *truster*: one who believes.
[2] *funeral bak'd meats*: in Shakespeare's time elaborate dinners were customary at funerals.
[3] *dearest*: used of any intense personal feeling; here, most hated.

HAMLET. The king my father!

HORATIO. Season your admiration[1] for a while
With an attent ear, till I may deliver,
Upon the witness of these gentlemen,
This marvel to you.

HAMLET. For God's love, let me hear!

HORATIO. Two nights together had these gentlemen,
Marcellus and Bernardo, on their watch,
In the dead waste and middle of the night,
Been thus encounter'd: a figure, like your father,
Armed at points[2] exactly, cap-a-pe,[3]
Appears before them, and with solemn march
Goes slow and stately by them; thrice he walk'd
By their oppress'd and fear-surprised eyes,
Within his truncheon's[4] length, whilst they, distill'd
Almost to jelly[5] with the act of fear,
Stand dumb and speak not to him.[6] This to me
In dreadful secrecy impart they did;
And I with them the third night kept the watch;
Where, as they had deliver'd, both in time,
Form of the thing, each word made true and good,
The apparition comes. I knew your father;
These hands are not more like.

HAMLET. But where was this?

MARCELLUS. My lord, upon the platform where we watch'd.

HAMLET. Did you[7] not speak to it?

[1] *season your admiration*: moderate your astonishment.
[2] *at points*: at all points. [3] *cap-a-pe*: from head to foot.
[4] *truncheon's*: staff's.
[5] *jelly*: suggesting the quivering from fear.
[6] *speak not to him*: hence the Ghost was unable to speak to them.
[7] *you*: emphasized by Hamlet; cf. line 206.

HORATIO. My lord, I did;
But answer made it none. Yet once methought
It lifted up its head and did address
Itself to motion like as it would speak;
But even then the morning cock crew loud,
And at the sound it shrunk in haste away
And vanish'd from our sight.
HAMLET. 'Tis very strange!
HORATIO. As I do live, my honour'd lord, 'tis true.
And we did think it writ down in our duty
To let you know of it.
HAMLET. Indeed, indeed, sirs, but this troubles me!
Hold you the watch to-night?
MARCELLUS. } We do, my lord.
BERNARDO. }
HAMLET. Arm'd, say you?
MARCELLUS. } Arm'd, my lord.
BERNARDO. }
HAMLET. From top to toe?
MARCELLUS. } My lord, from head to foot.
BERNARDO. }
HAMLET. Then saw you not his face.
HORATIO. O yes, my lord; he wore his beaver up.
HAMLET. What, look'd he frowningly?
HORATIO. A countenance more in sorrow than in anger.
HAMLET. Pale, or red?
HORATIO. Nay, very pale.
HAMLET. And fix'd his eyes upon you?
HORATIO. Most constantly.
HAMLET. I would I had been there!
HORATIO. It would have much amaz'd you.
HAMLET. Very like; very like. Stay'd it long?

HORATIO. While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred.

MARCELLUS. } Longer, longer.
BERNARDO. }

HORATIO. Not when I saw it.

HAMLET. His beard was grizzled,[1] no?

HORATIO. It was, as I have seen it in his life,
A sable[2] silver'd.

HAMLET. I will watch to-night;
Perchance 'twill walk again.

HORATIO. I warrant it will.

HAMLET. If it assume my noble father's person,
I'll speak to it though hell itself should gape[3]
And bid me hold my peace! I pray you all,
If you have hitherto conceal'd this sight,
Let it be tenable[4] in your silence still;
And whatsoever else shall hap to-night,
Give it an understanding, but no tongue:
I will requite your loves. So, fare you well.
Upon the platform, 'twixt eleven and twelve,
I'll visit you.

ALL. Our duty to your honour.

HAMLET. Your love, as mine to you. Farewell.

[*Exeunt* HORATIO, MARCELLUS, *and* BERNARDO.

My father's spirit — in arms! All is not well.
I doubt[5] some foul play. Would the night were come!
Till then sit still, my soul. Foul deeds will rise,
Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes.

[*Exit.*

[1] *grizzled*: grey. [2] *sable*: black.
[3] *gape*: to open the mouth wide; also, to bawl or shout.
[4] *tenable*: held, kept. [5] *doubt*: suspect.

SCENE III. *Later the same day. A room in* POLONIUS' *house.*
Enter LAERTES *and* OPHELIA.

LAERTES. My necessaries are embark'd. Farewell.
And, sister, as the winds give benefit,
And convoy[1] is assistant, do not sleep,
But let me hear from you.
OPHELIA. Do you doubt that?
LAERTES. For Hamlet, and the trifling of his favour,
Hold it a fashion and a toy in blood,
A violet in the youth of primy[2] nature,
Forward,[3] not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance[4] of a minute,
No more.
OPHELIA. No more but so?
LAERTES. Think it no more:
For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews[5] and bulk, but, as this temple[6] waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal. Perhaps he loves you now,
And now no soil nor cautel[7] doth besmirch
The virtue of his will; but you must fear,
His greatness weigh'd, his will is not his own,
For he himself is subject to his birth;
He may not, as unvalu'd persons do,
Carve for himself; for on his choice depends
The safety and the health of the whole state,
And therefore must his choice be circumscrib'd
Unto the voice and yielding of that body

[1] *convoy*: conveyance (i.e. a ship).
[2] *primy*: of the spring-time.
[3] *forward*: early well-developed.
[4] *suppliance*: filling up.
[5] *thews*: muscles.
[6] *temple*: the body.
[7] *cautel*: deceit.

Whereof he is the head. Then, if he says he loves you,
It fits your wisdom so far to believe it
As he in his peculiar sect and force[1]
May give his saying deed; which is no further
Than the main voice of Denmark goes withal.
Then weigh what loss your honour may sustain
If with too credent ear you list his songs,
Or lose your heart, or your chaste treasure open
To his unmaster'd[2] importunity.
Fear it, Ophelia! fear it, my dear sister!
And keep you in the rear of your affection,
Out of the shot and danger of desire.
The chariest[3] maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon;
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious strokes;
The canker[4] galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons[5] be disclos'd;
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.
Be wary then. Best safety lies in fear:
Youth to itself rebels, though none else near.

OPHELIA. I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
As watchman to my heart. But, good my brother,
Do not, as some ungracious pastors[6] do,
Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,
Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
Himself the primrose path[7] of dalliance treads,

[1] *peculiar sect and force*: individual rank and power.
[2] *unmastered*: uncontrolled. [3] *chariest*: shyest.
[4] *canker*: canker-worm. [5] *buttons*: buds.
[6] *ungracious pastors*: clerics devoid of spiritual grace.
[7] *primrose path*: cf. *Macbeth*, II, III, 51: "the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire."

And recks not his own rede.[1]

LAERTES. O, fear me not.
I stay too long. But here my father comes.

Enter POLONIUS. LAERTES *kneels for a blessing.*

A double blessing is a double grace;
Occasion smiles upon a second leave.

POLONIUS. Yet here, Laertes! Aboard, aboard, for shame!
The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail,
And you are stay'd for! There — my blessing with thee. [*Places his hand upon* LAERTES' *head.*
And these few precepts in thy memory
See thou character. Give thy thoughts no tongue,
Nor any unproportion'd[2] thought his act.
Be thou familiar, but by no means vulgar.[3]
The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hoops of steel;
But do not dull thy palm[4] with entertainment
Of each new-hatch'd, unfledg'd comrade. Beware
Of entrance to a quarrel; but, being in,
Bear't that th' opposed may beware of thee.
Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice;
Take each man's censure,[5] but reserve thy judgment.
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy —
But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man,
And they in France of the best rank and station
Are most select and generous chief in that.

[1] *rede*: advice.
[2] *unproportion'd*: unshaped, not properly formed.
[3] *vulgar*: common (in respect of association with others).
[4] *dull thy palm*: make thy palm callous by too much handshaking.
[5] *censure*: opinion.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.[1]
This above all: To thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.
Farewell! My blessing season[2] this in thee!

LAERTES. Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

POLONIUS. The time invites you; go. Your servants tend.

LAERTES. Farewell, Ophelia; and remember well
What I have said to you.

OPHELIA. 'Tis in my memory lock'd,
And you yourself shall keep the key of it.

LAERTES. Farewell! [*Exit.*

POLONIUS. What is't, Ophelia, he hath said to you?

OPHELIA. So please you, something touching the Lord Hamlet.

POLONIUS. Marry, well bethought!
'Tis told me he hath very oft of late
Given private time to you, and you yourself
Have of your audience been most free and bounteous.
If it be so — as so 'tis put on me,
And that in way of caution — I must tell you,
You do not understand yourself so clearly
As it behoves my daughter and your honour.
What is between you? Give me up the truth!

OPHELIA. He hath, my lord, of late made many tenders
Of his affection to me.

POLONIUS. Affection! Pooh! You speak like a green girl,

[1] *husbandry*: thrift.
[2] *season*: two meanings are possible (1) ripen (2) render palatable.

Unsifted in such perilous circumstance.
Do you believe his "tenders," as you call them?
OPHELIA. I do not know, my lord, what I should think.
POLONIUS. Marry, I'll teach you! think yourself a baby,
That you have ta'en his "tenders" for true pay,
Which are not sterling. "Tender" yourself more dearly;
Or — not to crack the wind[1] of the poor phrase
Running it thus — you'll "tender" me a fool.
OPHELIA. My lord, he hath importun'd me with love
In honourable fashion —
POLONIUS. Ay, "fashion" you may call it. Go to! Go to![2]
OPHELIA. And hath given countenance to his speech, my lord,
With almost all the holy vows of heaven.
POLONIUS. Ay, springes to catch woodcocks![3] I do know,
When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows. These blazes, daughter,
Giving more light than heat — extinct in both,
Even in their promise as it is a-making —
You must not take for fire. From this time
Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence;
Set your entreatments[4] at a higher rate
Than a command to parley. For Lord Hamlet,
Believe so much in him, that he is young,
And with a larger tether may he walk
Than may be given you. In few, Ophelia,

[1] *crack the wind*: as of a horse, by running it too fast and far.
[2] *go to*: an exclamation of impatience.
[3] *springes to catch woodcocks*: snares to catch simpletons.
[4] *entreatments*: interviews.

Do not believe his vows; for they are brokers,[1]
Not of that dye which their investments show,
But mere implorators of unholy suits,
Breathing like sanctified and pious bawds
The better to beguile. This is for all:[2]
I would not, in plain terms, from this time forth
Have you so slander any moment's leisure
As to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet.
Look to't, I charge you! Come your ways.
OPHELIA. I shall obey, my lord. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IV. *Midnight of the same day. Before the castle.*
HAMLET, HORATIO, *and* MARCELLUS *on the sentinel's platform waiting for the visitation of the Ghost.*

HAMLET. The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold.
HORATIO. It is a nipping and an eager[3] air.
HAMLET. What hour now?
HORATIO. I think it lacks of twelve.
MARCELLUS. No, it is struck.
HORATIO. Indeed? I heard it not. Then it draws near the season
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.
[*The roll of kettle-drums, a flourish of trumpets, and two cannon shot off within.*
What does this mean, my lord?
HAMLET. The king doth wake[4] to-night, and takes his rouse,[5]
Keeps wassail,[6] and the swaggering up-spring[7] reels;

[1] *brokers*: panders to sexual indulgence.
[2] *for all*: final; or, in short.
[3] *eager*: sharp.
[4] *wake*: revel in drink.
[5] *rouse*: carousal of drinking.
[6] *wassail*: revelling in drink.
[7] *up-spring*: a drunken dance, the German *Hüpfauf*, the last and wildest dance in old German carousals.

And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray[1] out
The triumph[2] of his pledge.

HORATIO. Is it a custom?

HAMLET. Ay, marry, is't:
But to my mind — though I am native here
And to the manner born — it is a custom
More honour'd in the breach than the observance.
This heavy-headed revel east and west
Makes us traduc'd and tax'd of other nations;
They clepe[3] us drunkards, and with swinish phrase[4]
Soil our addition;[5] and, indeed, it takes
From our achievements, though perform'd at height,
The pith and marrow of our attribute:[6]
So, oft it chances in particular men,
That for some vicious mole[7] of nature in them,
As in their birth — wherein they are not guilty,
Since nature cannot choose his origin —
By the o'ergrowth of some complexion,[8]
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
Or by some habit that too much o'er-leavens
The form of plausive[9] manners, that these men,
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect —
Being nature's livery, or fortune's star[10] —
Their virtues else, be they as pure as grace,

[1] *bray*: possibly used with a note of sarcasm.
[2] *triumph*: used contemptuously. [3] *clepe*: call.
[4] *swinish phrase*: terms applicable to swine.
[5] *addition*: a descriptive phrase added to a proper name in order to characterize that person.
[6] *our attribute*: reputation ascribed to us. [7] *mole*: blemish.
[8] *complexion*: natural disposition. [9] *plausive*: pleasing.
[10] *fortune's star*: one's temperament was supposed to be determined by the planet under which he was, by chance, born.

As infinite as man may undergo,
Shall, in the general censure, take corruption
From that particular fault: the dram of eale
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt[1]
To his own scandal —

Enter Ghost.

HORATIO. Look, my lord! It comes!
HAMLET. Angels and ministers of grace defend us! —
Be thou a spirit of health,[2] or goblin damn'd,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked, or charitable,
Thou comest in such a questionable[3] shape
That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee "Hamlet,"
"King," "Father." — Royal Dane, O, answer me!
Let me not burst in ignorance; but tell
Why thy canoniz'd[4] bones, hearsed in death,
Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,
Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws
To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon,
Making night hideous, and we fools of nature[5]
So horridly to shake our disposition
With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
Say, why is this? Wherefore? What should we do?

[*The Ghost beckons* HAMLET.

[1] *eale . . . doubt*: the passage is corrupt.
[2] *spirit of health*: wholesome; some spirits were malignant — devils in disguise.
[3] *questionable*: provoking questioning. [4] *canonized*: consecrated.
[5] *we fools of nature*: we, creatures in a natural world, are fools in the presence of the supernatural.

HORATIO. It beckons you to go away with it,
As if it some impartment did desire
To you alone. [*The Ghost beckons again.*
MARCELLUS. Look, with what courteous action
It waves you to a more removed ground.
But do not go with it!
HORATIO. No! by no means!
HAMLET. It will not speak? then will I follow it.
HORATIO. Do not, my lord!
HAMLET. Why, what should be the fear?
I do not set my life at a pin's fee;
And for my soul, what can it do to that,
Being a thing immortal as itself?
[*The Ghost beckons a third time.*
It waves me forth again. I'll follow it.
HORATIO. What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord?
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form
Which might deprive[1] your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? Think of it.
The very place puts toys of desperation,[2]
Without more motive, into every brain
That looks so many fathoms to the sea
And hears it roar beneath. [*The Ghost beckons again.*
HAMLET. It waves me still. — Go on; I'll follow thee.
MARCELLUS. You shall not go, my lord! [*They seize him.*
HAMLET. Hold off your hands!
HORATIO. Be rul'd. You shall not go!

[1] *deprive*: divest of office (here applied to "sovereignty of reason").
[2] *toys of desperation*: freakish notions of reckless behavior (i.e. suicide).

HAMLET. My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.[1]
[*The Ghost beckons again.*
Still am I call'd. — Unhand me, gentlemen!
[*Draws his sword.*
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets[2] me!
I say, away! [*He breaks from them.*
Go on; I'll follow thee.
[*Exit the Ghost, followed by* HAMLET *with sword drawn.*
HORATIO. He waxes desperate with imagination.
MARCELLUS. Let's follow; 'tis not fit thus to obey him.
HORATIO. Have after. To what issue will this come?
MARCELLUS. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.
HORATIO. Heaven will direct it.
MARCELLUS. Nay, let's follow him.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE V. *A few moments later. Another part of the platform. Enter Ghost and* HAMLET.

HAMLET. Whither wilt thou lead me? Speak. I'll go no further.
GHOST. Mark me!
HAMLET. I will.
GHOST. My hour is almost come
When I to sulphurous and tormenting flames
Must render up myself.
HAMLET. Alas! poor ghost!
GHOST. Pity me not, but lend thy serious hearing
To what I shall unfold.

[1] *nerve*: muscle. [2] *lets*: hinders.

HAMLET. Speak; I am bound to hear.
GHOST. So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt hear!
HAMLET. What?
GHOST. I am thy father's spirit,
Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confin'd to fast[1] in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purg'd away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part
And each particular hair to stand an end
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.[2]
But this eternal blazon[3] must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, Hamlet! O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love —
HAMLET. O God!
GHOST. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!
HAMLET. Murder!
GHOST. Murder — most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.
HAMLET. Haste me to know't, that I with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love
May sweep to my revenge!
GHOST. I find thee apt.
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat[4] weed

[1] *fast*: possibly alluding to deprivation of food as one of the torments of purgatory.
[2] *porpentine*: porcupine.
[3] *eternal blazon*: divulgation of things eternal.
[4] *fat*: soft, flabby, limp (hence spiritless).

That roots itself in ease on Lethe[1] wharf
Wouldst thou not stir in this! Now, Hamlet, hear:
'Tis given out that, sleeping in mine orchard,[2]
A serpent stung me; so the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forged process[3] of my death
Rankly abus'd. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.

HAMLET. O my prophetic soul!
My uncle?

GHOST. Ay. That incestuous, that adulterate beast,
With witchcraft of his wit, with traitorous gifts —
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce! — won to his shameful lust
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O, Hamlet! What a falling-off was there,
From me, whose love was of that dignity[4]
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage; and to decline
Upon a wretch, whose natural gifts[5] were poor
To those of mine!
But virtue, as it never will be mov'd,
Though lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,[6]
So lust, though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed,
And prey on garbage. —
But, soft! methinks I scent the morning air.
Brief let me be. Sleeping within mine orchard —
My custom always in the afternoon —

[1] *Lethe*: the river of forgetfulness. [2] *orchard*: garden.
[3] *process*: story, tale. [4] *dignity*: excellence, nobleness.
[5] *natural gifts*: gifts of nature (physique, etc.).
[6] *a shape of heaven*: a heavenly disguise, the form of an angel.

Upon my secure[1] hour thy uncle stole,
With juice of cursed hebona in a vial,
And in the porches of mine ears did pour
The leperous distilment; whose effect
Holds such an enmity with blood of man
That swift as quicksilver it courses through
The natural gates and alleys of the body,
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset[2]
And curd, like eager[3] droppings into milk,
The thin and wholesome blood: so did it mine;
And a most instant tetter[4] bark'd about,
Most lazar-like,[5] with vile and loathsome crust,
All my smooth body.
Thus was I, sleeping, by a brother's hand,
Of life, of crown, of queen, at once dispatch'd;
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd,[6]
No reckoning made, but sent to my account
With all my imperfections on my head.
O, horrible! O, horrible! most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not!
Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
A couch for luxury and damned incest! —
But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge,
To prick and sting her. — Fare thee well at once!

[1] *secure*: free from apprehension or fear. [2] *posset*: curdle.
[3] *eager*: sour. [4] *tetter*: an eruption of the skin.
[5] *lazar-like*: resembling leprosy.
[6] *Unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd*: without having received the eucharist, not made ready, unanointed with extreme unction.

The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his uneffectual[1] fire.
Adieu! — Adieu! —— Hamlet, remember me!

[*The Ghost sinks beneath the stage.* HAMLET *for a time stands dazed, then tremblingly sags to his knees.*

HAMLET. O all you host of heaven! — O earth! — What else?
And shall I couple hell? O fie! — Hold, hold, my heart!
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up! [*Rises.*] Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe.[2] Remember thee?
Yea, from the table[3] of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond[4] records,
All saws[5] of books, all forms, all pressures[6] past
That youth and observation copied there,
And thy commandment, all alone, shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain
Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven! —
O most pernicious woman! —
O villain! villain! smiling, damned villain!
My tables. [*He takes out his memorandum-book.*
Meet it is I set it down,
That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain —
At least I'm sure it may be so in Denmark. [*Writing.*
So, uncle, there you are! Now to my word;[7]
It is [*Writing.*] "Adieu, adieu! Remember me!" —
I have sworn't!

[1] *uneffectual*: without heat.
[2] *globe*: head.
[3] *table*: table-book, notebook.
[4] *fond*: foolish.
[5] *saws*: wise sayings.
[6] *pressures*: things impressed or inscribed (in a table-book).
[7] *word*: command.

HORATIO. [*Within.*] My lord! My lord!
MARCELLUS. [*Within.*] Lord Hamlet!
HORATIO. [*Within.*] Heaven secure him.
MARCELLUS. [*Within.*] So be it!
HORATIO. [*Within.*] Hillo! ho ho! My lord!
HAMLET. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come, bird, come![1]

Enter HORATIO *and* MARCELLUS.

MARCELLUS. How is't, my noble lord?
HORATIO. What news, my lord?
HAMLET. O, wonderful!
HORATIO. Good my lord, tell it.
HAMLET. No; you'll reveal it.
HORATIO. Not I, my lord, by heaven!
MARCELLUS. Nor I, my lord.
HAMLET. How say you, then! Would heart of man once think it!
But, you'll be secret?
HORATIO. }
MARCELLUS. } Ay, by heaven, my lord.
HAMLET. There's ne'er a villain dwelling in all Denmark ——
But he's an arrant knave.
HORATIO. There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave
To tell us this.
HAMLET. Why, right! you are i' the right!
And so, without more circumstance[2] at all,
I hold it fit that we shake hands and part.

[*Shakes hands with them.*

You, as your business and desire shall point you —

[1] The cry of the falconer to the hawk, half sung or intoned.
[2] *circumstance*: ado.

For every man hath business and desire,
Such as it is — and, for mine own poor part,
Look you, I'll go pray.

HORATIO. These are but wild and whirling words, my lord.

HAMLET. I am sorry they offend you; heartily;
Yes, faith, heartily.

HORATIO. There's no offence, my lord.

HAMLET. Yes, by Saint Patrick, but there is, Horatio!
And much offence, too. Touching this vision here,
It is an honest ghost,[1] that let me tell you.
For your desire to know what is between us,
O'ermaster't as you may. And now, good friends,
As you are friends, scholars, and soldiers,
Give me one poor request.

HORATIO. What is't, my lord? we will.

HAMLET. Never make known what you have seen to-night.

HORATIO. } My lord, we will not.
MARCELLUS. }

HAMLET. Nay, but swear't.

HORATIO. In faith,
My lord, not I.

MARCELLUS. Nor I, my lord, in faith.

HAMLET. [*Holding up his sword.*] Upon my sword.[2]

MARCELLUS. We have sworn, my lord, already.

HAMLET. Indeed, upon my sword; indeed!

GHOST. [*Beneath.*] Swear!

HAMLET. Ah, ha, boy![3] say'st thou so? Art thou there, true-penny?[4] —

[1] *an honest ghost*: cf. I, iv, 40: "Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd."

[2] *sword*: regularly employed as the symbol of the cross.

[3] *boy*: a familiar form of address, often with the adjective "old."

[4] *true-penny*: old fellow.

Come on; you hear this fellow in the cellarage.
[He leads them to another place, and holds up his sword.
Consent to swear.

HORATIO. Propose the oath, my lord.

HAMLET. Never to speak of this that you have seen.
Swear by my sword.

GHOST. [*Beneath.*] Swear!

HAMLET. *Hic et ubique*?[1] then we'll shift our ground. —
Come hither, gentlemen; *[He leads them to another place.*
And lay your hands again upon my sword.
Never to speak of this that you have heard;
Swear by my sword.

GHOST. [*Beneath.*] Swear!

HAMLET. Well said, old mole! Canst work i' the earth so fast?
A worthy pioner![2] — Once more remove, good friends. *[He leads them to another place.*

HORATIO. O day and night, but this is wondrous strange!

HAMLET. And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.
There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your[3] philosophy.
But come. *[He holds up his sword.*
Here, as before, never, so help you mercy,
How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself —
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on —
That you, at such times seeing me, never shall,

[1] *Hic et ubique*: here and everywhere.
[2] *pioner*: one who digs a trench (a military term).
[3] *your philosophy*: the pronoun is used ethically; the meaning is simply "philosophy."

With arms encumber'd[1] thus, or this head-shake,
Or by pronouncing of some doubtful phrase
As "Well, well, we know," or, "We could, an if we would,"
Or, "If we list to speak," or, "There be, an if they might,"
Or such ambiguous giving-out,[2] to note
That you know aught of me. This not to do,
So grace and mercy at your most need help you.
Swear!

GHOST. [*Beneath.*] Swear!

HAMLET. Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!
[*They swear, touching their lips to the sword.*
So, gentlemen,
With all my love I do commend me to you:
And what so poor a man as Hamlet is
May do to express his love and friending to you,
God willing, shall not lack. Let us go in together.
And still[3] your fingers on your lips, I pray.
[*Aside.*] The time is out of joint; O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!
[*Aloud.*] Nay, come; let's go together. [*Exeunt.*

[1] *encumber'd*: folded, as in superior knowledge.
[2] *giving-out*: intimation. [3] *still*: ever, always.

ACT II

SCENE I. *Two months later. A room in Polonius' house. Enter* POLONIUS *and his servant* REYNALDO.

POLONIUS. Give him this money, and these notes, Reynaldo.

REYNALDO. I will, my lord.

POLONIUS. You shall do marvellous wisely, good Reynaldo,
Before you visit him, to make inquiry
Of his behaviour.

REYNALDO. My lord, I did intend it.

POLONIUS. Marry, well said! very well said! Look you, sir,
Inquire me first what Danskers[1] are in Paris;
And how, and who; what means, and where they keep;[2]
What company, at what expense: and, finding
By this encompassment and drift[3] of question
That they do know my son, come you more nearer
Than your particular demands will touch it;
Take you, as 'twere, some distant knowledge of him,
As thus: "I know his father, and his friends;
And, in part, him." — Do you mark this, Reynaldo?

REYNALDO. Ay, very well, my lord.

POLONIUS. "And, in part, him; but," you may say, "not well:
But if't be he I mean, he's very wild,

[1] *Danskers*: Danes. [2] *keep*: reside.
[3] *encompassment and drift*: roundabout method.

Addicted" — so and so. And there put on him
What forgeries you please; marry, none so rank
As may dishonour him; take heed of that!
But, sir, such wanton, wild, and usual slips
As are companions noted and most known
To youth and liberty.

REYNALDO. As gaming,[1] my lord?

POLONIUS. Ay; or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling, ——
Drabbing; you may go so far.

REYNALDO. My lord! that would dishonour him.

POLONIUS. Faith, no; as you may season it in the charge.[2]
You must not put another[3] scandal on him,
That he is open to incontinency;
That's not my meaning; but breathe his faults so quaintly[4]
That they may seem the taints of liberty,
The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind,
A savageness in unreclaimed blood,[5]
Of general assault.[6]

REYNALDO. But, my good lord, —

POLONIUS. Wherefore should you do this?

REYNALDO. Ay, my lord;
I would know that.

POLONIUS. Marry, sir, here's my drift,
And, I believe, it is a fetch of warrant:[7]

[1] *gaming*: gambling.
[2] *season it in the charge*: qualify it in the imputation, render it attractive in the way you put it.
[3] *another*: a certain further.
[4] *quaintly*: elegantly.
[5] *unreclaimed blood*: untamed youth (cf. "wild-oats").
[6] *of general assault*: common to young men in general.
[7] *a fetch of warrant*: a sure or guaranteed device.

You laying these slight sullies on my son,
As 'twere a thing a little soil'd i' the working[1] —
Mark you?
Your party in converse — him you would sound[2] —
Having ever seen in the prenominate crimes
The youth you breathe of guilty, be assur'd
He closes with you in this consequence:[3]
"Good sir," or so; or "Friend," or "Gentleman,"
According to the phrase or the addition[4]
Of man and country ——

REYNALDO. Very good, my lord.

POLONIUS. And then, sir — does he this — he does —
What was I about to say? By the mass I was about to say something. Where did I leave?

REYNALDO. At "closes in the consequence,"
At "friend or so," and "gentleman."

POLONIUS. At "closes in the consequence"? ay, marry!
He closes with you thus: "I know the gentleman;
I saw him yesterday, or t'other day,
Or then, or then, with such, or such; and, as you say,
There was he gaming; there, o'ertook in's rouse;[5]
There, falling out at tennis"; or, perchance,
"I saw him enter such a house of sale,"
Videlicet, a brothel; or so forth.
See you now?
Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth.
And thus do we of wisdom and of reach,

[1] *a thing . . . working*: a young man a little contaminated by his contact with the world.
[2] *sound*: get information from.
[3] *consequence*: following up (of your talk).
[4] *addition*: style of address.
[5] *o'ertook in's rouse*: overcome by drink.

With windlasses,[1] and with assays of bias,[2]
By indirections find directions out:
So, by my former lecture and advice,
Shall you my son. You have me, have you not?
REYNALDO. My lord, I have.
POLONIUS. God be wi' you; fare you well!
REYNALDO. Good my lord. [*Leaving.*
POLONIUS. Observe his inclination in yourself.
REYNALDO. I shall, my lord.
POLONIUS. And let him ply his music.[3]
REYNALDO. Well, my lord.
POLONIUS. Farewell! [*Exit* REYNALDO.

Enter OPHELIA *running in fright.*

How now, Ophelia! What's the matter?
OPHELIA. Oh, my lord! my lord! I have been so affrighted!
POLONIUS. With what, in the name of God?
OPHELIA. My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,[4]
Lord Hamlet, with his doublet[5] all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved[6] to his ankle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous in purport
As if he had been loosed out of hell
To speak of horrors, he comes before me.

[1] *windlasses*: winding turns.
[2] *assays of bias*: a term used in bowling; when the bowl is made to run in an oblique line.
[3] *ply his music*: give him rope, let him sow his wild oats.
[4] *closet*: private room.
[5] *doublet*: the upper part of a man's costume, extending from the waist to the neck.
[6] *down-gyved*: fallen; men's stockings reached to or above the knee.

POLONIUS. Mad for thy love?
OPHELIA. My lord, I do not know;
But, truly, I do fear it.
POLONIUS. What said he?
OPHELIA. He took me by the wrist, and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face
As he would draw it. Long[1] stay'd he so.
At last, a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk[2]
And end his being. That done, he lets me go.
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me.
POLONIUS. Come! Go with me! I will go seek the king.
This is the very ecstasy[3] of love,
Whose violent property fordoes[4] itself
And leads the will to desperate undertakings
As oft as any passion under heaven
That does afflict our natures. I am sorry ——
What! have you given him any hard words of late?
OPHELIA. No, my good lord; but — as you did command —
I did repel his letters, and denied
His access to me.

[1] *Long*: note how the metre calls for a prolonged emphasis on this word.
[2] *bulk*: the whole frame of the body.
[3] *ecstasy*: madness, insanity. [4] *fordoes*: destroys.

POLONIUS. That hath made him mad!
I am sorry that with better heed and judgment
I had not quoted[1] him. I fear'd he did but trifle,
And meant to wrack thee. But, beshrew my jealousy!
It seems it is as proper to our age
To cast beyond ourselves[2] in our opinions
As it is common for the younger sort
To lack discretion. Come, go we to the king.
This must be known; which, being kept close, might move
More grief to hide than hate to utter[3] love.
Come! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *Later the same day. A room in the castle.*
Enter KING, QUEEN, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, *and Attendants.*

KING. Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!
Moreover that we much did long to see you,
The need we have to use you did provoke
Our hasty sending. Something have you heard
Of Hamlet's transformation — so I call it,
Since nor the exterior[4] nor the inward man
Resembles that it was. What it should be,
More than his father's death, that thus hath put him
So much from the understanding of himself,
I cannot dream of. I entreat you both,
That, being of so young days brought up with him,
And since so neighbour'd to his youth and humour,[5]
That you vouchsafe your rest here in our court
Some little time; so by your companies

[1] *quoted*: understood. [2] *cast beyond ourselves*: be over-cautious.
[3] *utter*: disclose. [4] *exterior*: cf. Ophelia's description of his dress.
[5] *humour*: disposition.

To draw him on to pleasures, and to gather,
So much as from occasion you may glean,
Whe'r aught to us unknown afflicts him thus,
That, open'd, lies within our remedy.

QUEEN. Good gentlemen, he hath much talk'd of you;
And sure I am two men there are not living
To whom he more adheres. If it will please you
To show us so much gentry[1] and good will
As to expend your time with us awhile
For the supply and profit of our hope,
Your visitation shall receive such thanks
As fits a king's remembrance.

ROSENCRANTZ. Both your majesties
Might, by the sovereign power you have of us,
Put your dread pleasures more into command
Than to entreaty.

GUILDENSTERN. But we both obey,
And here give up ourselves in the full bent,[2]
To lay our service freely at your feet
To be commanded.

KING. Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.

QUEEN. Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.
And I beseech you instantly to visit
My too much changed son. — Go, some of you,
And bring these gentlemen where Hamlet is.

GUILDENSTERN. Heavens make our presence and our practices
Pleasant and helpful to him!

QUEEN. Ay, amen!

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, *and Attendants*.

[1] *gentry*: courtesy. [2] *full bent*: a term in archery, completely.

Enter POLONIUS.

POLONIUS. The ambassadors from Norway, my good lord,
Are joyfully return'd.
KING. Thou still hast been the father of good news.
POLONIUS. Have I, my lord? Assure you, my good liege,
I hold my duty, as I hold my soul,
Both to my God and to my gracious king.
And I do think — or else this brain of mine
Hunts not the trail[1] of policy so sure
As it hath us'd to do — that I have found
The very cause of Hamlet's lunacy.
KING. O, speak of that! that do I long to hear.
POLONIUS. Give first admittance to the ambassadors;
My news shall be the fruit[2] to that great feast.
KING. Thyself do grace to them and bring them in.
[*Exit* POLONIUS.
He tells me, my sweet queen, that he hath found
The head and source of all your son's distemper.
QUEEN. I doubt it is no other but the main —
His father's death, and our o'erhasty marriage.
KING. Well, we shall sift him.

Re-enter POLONIUS, *with* VOLTIMAND *and* CORNELIUS.

Welcome, my good friends!
Say, Voltimand, what from our brother Norway?
VOLTIMAND. Most fair return of greetings and desires.[3]

[1] *hunts not the trail*: the image is that of a hound following the scent.
[2] *fruit*: dessert.
[3] *desires*: the conventional wishes for good health and happiness contained in Claudius' communication to old Norway.

Upon our first,[1] he sent out to suppress
His nephew's levies, which to him appear'd
To be a preparation[2] 'gainst the Polack,
But, better look'd into, he truly found
It was against your highness; whereat griev'd
That so his sickness, age, and impotence
Was falsely borne in hand,[3] sends out arrests
On Fortinbras; which he, in brief, obeys,
Receives rebuke from Norway, and, in fine,[4]
Makes vow before his uncle never more
To give the assay of arms against your majesty.
Whereon old Norway, overcome with joy,
Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee,
And his commission to employ those soldiers,
So levied as before, against the Polack;
With an entreaty, herein further shown, [*Giving a paper.*
That it might please you to give quiet pass
Through your dominions for this enterprise,
On such regards of safety and allowance
As therein are set down.

KING. It likes us well;
And at our more consider'd time we'll read,
Answer, and think upon this business:
Meantime we thank you for your well-took labour.
Go to your rest; at night we'll feast together.
Most welcome home.

[*Exeunt* VOLTIMAND *and* CORNELIUS.

POLONIUS. This business is well ended.
My liege, and madam, to expostulate

[1] *our first*: our first interview.
[2] *preparation*: an organized military force.
[3] *borne in hand*: deceived with false pretenses.
[4] *in fine*: in the end.

What majesty should be, what duty is,
Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
Therefore, since brevity is the soul of wit,
And tediousness the limbs and outward flourishes,
I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.
Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?
But let that go.

QUEEN. More matter, with less art.

POLONIUS. Madam, I swear I use no art at all.
That he is mad, 'tis true; 'tis true 'tis pity;
And, pity 'tis 'tis true. A foolish figure;
But farewell it, for I will use no art.
Mad let us grant him, then. And now remains
That we find out the cause of this effect —
Or rather say, the cause of this defect;
For this effect-defective comes by cause.
Thus it remains, and the remainder thus.
Perpend![1]
I have a daughter — have while she is mine —
Who, in her duty and obedience, — mark! —
Hath given me this. [*Holds up a letter.*
Now, gather, and surmise!
[*Reads the address on the outside.*

To the celestial, and my soul's idol, the most beautified Ophelia, —

That's an ill phrase! a vile phrase! "beautified" is a vile phrase. But you shall hear. Thus:

[1] *Perpend*: give careful heed. Shakespeare takes the word from the pompous old tragedy of *Cambyses*, and always uses it with a gleam of humour.

in her excellent white bosom, these, &c.[1]

QUEEN. [*Reaching out for the letter.*] Came this from Hamlet to her?

POLONIUS. Good madam, stay awhile. I will be faithful. [*Unfolds the letter and reads.*

Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love.

O dear Ophelia! I am ill at these numbers:[2] *I have not art to reckon my groans; but that I love thee, Best, O most Best! believe it. Adieu.*

Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine[3] *is to him,*
Hamlet.

This, in obedience, hath my daughter shown me;
And, more above, hath his solicitings,
As they fell out by time, by means, and place,
All given to mine ear.

KING. But how hath she
Receiv'd his love?

POLONIUS. [*In an injured tone.*] What do you think of me?

KING. As of a man faithful and honourable.

POLONIUS. I would fain prove so. But what might you think,
When I had seen this hot love on the wing —
As I perceiv'd it, I must tell you that,

[1] *&c.*: the conventional addition was "deliver these."

[2] *numbers*: verses, at versifying.

[3] *machine*: the body. Hamlet's complimentary close is in the artificial style of the sixteenth century; compare the modern French usage.

Before my daughter told me — what might you,
Or my dear majesty your queen here, think,
If I had play'd the desk or table-book,[1]
Or given my heart a winking mute and dumb,
Or look'd upon this love with idle sight?
What might you think? No! I went round[2] to work,
And my young mistress thus I did bespeak:
"Lord Hamlet is a prince, out of thy star;[3]
This must not be!" And then I precepts gave her,
That she should lock herself from his resort,
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice;
And he, repulsed — a short tale to make —
Fell into a sadness; then into a fast;
Thence to a watch;[4] thence into a weakness;
Thence to a lightness;[5] and, by this declension,
Into the madness wherein now he raves
And all we wail for!

KING. [*To* GERTRUDE.] Do you think 'tis this?

QUEEN. It may be; very likely.

POLONIUS. Hath there been such a time — I'd fain know that —
That I have positively said, "'Tis so,"
When it prov'd otherwise?

KING. Not that I know.

POLONIUS. Take this from this, if this be otherwise.
[*Pointing to his head and shoulder.*

[1] *play'd . . . table-book*: concealed the matter, as in a desk or in a private memorandum-book.

[2] *round*: vigorously.

[3] *out of thy star*: beyond you in rank and fortune (things determined by one's natal star).

[4] *watch*: state of sleeplessness.

[5] *lightness*: of mind; light-headedness.

If circumstances lead me, I will find
Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed
Within the centre![1]

KING. How may we try it further?

POLONIUS. You know sometimes he walks four[2] hours together

Here in the lobby.

QUEEN. So he does indeed.

POLONIUS. At such a time I'll loose[3] my daughter to him;
Be you and I behind an arras then;
Mark the encounter. If he love her not,
And be not from his reason fallen thereon,
Let me be no assistant for a state,
But keep a farm and carters.

KING. We will try it.

QUEEN. But look, where sadly the poor wretch comes reading.

POLONIUS. Away, I do beseech you! both away!
I'll board[4] him presently.[5]

[*Exeunt* KING *and* QUEEN.

Enter HAMLET, *reading on a book.* POLONIUS *steps before him.*

O, give me leave.
How does my good Lord Hamlet?

HAMLET. Well, God a-mercy.

POLONIUS. Do you know me, my lord?

HAMLET. Excellent well; you are a fishmonger.[6]

[1] *centre*: of the earth.
[2] *four*: commonly used in the sense of "several," or "many."
[3] *loose*: the image is that of loosing a dog upon its prey.
[4] *board*: a nautical term, to board an enemy ship in attack.
[5] *presently*: at once.
[6] *fishmonger*: a foul-smelling trade, and hence applied to a seller of woman's chastity.

POLONIUS. Not I, my lord!

HAMLET. Then I would you were so honest[1] a man.

POLONIUS. "Honest," my lord?

HAMLET. Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

POLONIUS. That's very true, my lord.

HAMLET. For, if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion[2] — Have you a daughter?

POLONIUS. I have, my lord.

HAMLET. Let her not walk i' the sun![3] Conception is a blessing — but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't!

POLONIUS. [*Aside.*] How say you by that? Still harping on my daughter! Yet he knew me not at first; he said I was a fishmonger. He is far gone! far gone! And, truly, in my youth I suffered much extremity for love; very near this. I'll speak to him again. — What do you read, my lord?

HAMLET. Words, words, words.

POLONIUS. What is the matter, my lord?

HAMLET. Between who?

POLONIUS. I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

HAMLET. Slanders, sir: for the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes purging thick amber or plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it not honesty to have it thus set down; for you

[1] *honest*: having honorable motives, with a glance at the common meaning of the word, "chaste."

[2] *good kissing carrion*: carrion good to kiss.

[3] *walk i' the sun*: in the sunshine of royal attention and favor.

yourself, sir, should be old, as I am — if, like a crab, you could go backward.

POLONIUS. [*Aside.*] Though this be madness, yet there is method in't! — Will you walk out of the air, my lord?

HAMLET. Into my grave?

POLONIUS. Indeed, that is out o' the air. [*Aside.*] How pregnant sometimes his replies are! a happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of. I will leave him, and suddenly contrive the means of meeting between him and my daughter. — My honourable lord, I will most humbly take my leave of you.

HAMLET. You cannot, sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal — except my life, except my life, except my life.

POLONIUS. Fare you well, my lord. [*Leaving.*

HAMLET. These tedious old fools!

Enter ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN. POLONIUS *meets them at the door.*

POLONIUS. You go to seek the Lord Hamlet? there he is.

ROSENCRANTZ. [*To* POLONIUS.] God save you, sir!

[*Exit* POLONIUS. GUILDENSTERN *and* ROSENCRANTZ *rush forward to greet* HAMLET.

GUILDENSTERN. Mine honoured lord!

ROSENCRANTZ. My most dear lord!

HAMLET. My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz! Good lads, how do ye both?

ROSENCRANTZ. As the indifferent[1] children of the earth.

GUILDENSTERN. Happy in that we are not over happy; On Fortune's cap we are not the very button.

[1] *indifferent*: average.

HAMLET. Nor the soles of her shoe?

ROSENCRANTZ. Neither, my lord.

HAMLET. Then you live about her waist, or in the middle of her favours?

GUILDENSTERN. Faith, her privates we.

HAMLET. In the secret parts of Fortune? O! most true; she is a strumpet. What news?

ROSENCRANTZ. None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

HAMLET. Then is doomsday near.[1] But your news is not true. Let me question more in particular. What have you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN. Prison, my lord!

HAMLET. Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ. Then is the world one.

HAMLET. A goodly one; in which there are many confines, wards, and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

ROSENCRANTZ. We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET. Why, then 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. To me it is a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ. Why, then your ambition makes it one. 'Tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET. O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN. Which dreams, indeed, are ambition; for the very substance of the ambitious is merely the shadow of a dream.

[1] *Then . . . near*: then the age of the millennium has come.

HAMLET. A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ. Truly; and I hold ambition of so airy and light a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

HAMLET. Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggars' shadows.[1] Shall we to the court? for, by my fay, I cannot reason.

ROSENCRANTZ. } We'll wait upon you.
GUILDENSTERN. }

HAMLET. No such matter; I will not sort you with the rest of my servants; for, to speak to you like an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended.[2] — But, in the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?

ROSENCRANTZ. To visit you, my lord; no other occasion.

HAMLET. Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks! But, I thank you; and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny.[3] — Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation? Come; come; deal justly with me. [*They hesitate.*] Come, come. Nay, speak.

GUILDENSTERN. What should we say, my lord?

HAMLET. Why anything, but to the purpose. You were sent for; and there is a kind of confession in your

[1] The meaning may be: Then beggars, who are devoid of ambition, must be "bodies," and monarchs and famed heroes, who are dominated by ambition, must be "shadows"; and since "shadows" are necessarily cast by "bodies," monarchs and heroes are merely "beggars' shadows." Hamlet, however, confesses "I cannot reason."

[2] *dreadfully attended*: Hamlet is aware of his uncle's suspicion and surveillance.

[3] *a halfpenny*: at a halfpenny.

looks which your modesties have not craft enough to colour.[1] I know the good king and queen have sent for you.

ROSENCRANTZ. To what end, my lord?

HAMLET. That you must teach me. — But let me conjure you: By the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for or no!

ROSENCRANTZ. [*Aside to* GUILDENSTERN.] What say you?

HAMLET. [*Aside.*] Nay, then, I have an eye of you. — If you love me, hold not off.

GUILDENSTERN. My lord, we were sent for.

HAMLET. I will tell you why; so shall my anticipation prevent your discovery,[2] and your secrecy to the king and queen moult no feather. I have of late — but wherefore I know not — lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory; this most excellent canopy, the air — look you! — this brave[3] o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,[4] — why, it appears no other thing to me but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty![5] in form, in moving, how express[6] and admirable! in action how like an angel! in appre-

[1] *colour*: hide.
[2] *prevent your discovery*: forestall your disclosure.
[3] *brave*: handsome, gorgeous.
[4] *golden fire*: the stars.
[5] *faculty*: ability to do things, capacity in general.
[6] *express*: well-framed.

hension[1] how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet to me, what is this quintessence[2] of dust? man delights not me. —— No, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.

ROSENCRANTZ. My lord, there was no such stuff in my thoughts.

HAMLET. Why did you laugh, then, when I said, "man delights not me"?

ROSENCRANTZ. To think, my lord, if you delight not in man, what lenten[3] entertainment the players shall receive from you. We coted[4] them on the way, and hither are they coming to offer you service.

HAMLET. He that plays the king shall be welcome, his majesty shall have tribute of me; the adventurous knight shall use his foil and target; the lover shall not sigh gratis; the humorous man[5] shall end his part in peace; the clown shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickle o' the sere;[6] and the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't. What players are they?

ROSENCRANTZ. Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

HAMLET. How chances it they travel? Their residence,[7] both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

[1] *apprehension*: the act of grasping with the intellect.
[2] *quintessence*: highly refined essence.
[3] *lenten*: poor; plays were forbidden by law during Lent.
[4] *coted*: passed.
[5] *humorous man*: plays in which a man with a "humour" took the leading part were at this time very popular; cf. *Every Man in his Humor* and *Every Man out of his Humor*.
[6] *tickle o' the sere*: easy on the trigger.
[7] *residence*: continuance in the city at their large theatre.

ROSENCRANTZ. I think their inhibition[1] comes by the means of the late innovation.[2]

HAMLET. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? Are they so followed?

ROSENCRANTZ. No indeed they are not!

HAMLET. How comes it? Do they grow rusty?

ROSENCRANTZ. Nay, their endeavour keeps in the wonted pace: but there is, sir, an aery[3] of children, little eyases,[4] that cry out on the top of question,[5] and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the "common stages"[6] — so they call them — that many wearing rapiers[7] are afraid of goose-quills,[8] and dare scarce come thither.

HAMLET. What! are they children? Who maintains 'em? How are they escoted?[9] Will they pursue the quality[10] no longer than they can sing? Will they not

[1] *inhibition*: closing their city theatre.

[2] *late innovation*: the children of the Chapel Royal had recently secured the enclosed private theatre called Blackfriars, and had begun to act plays before the London public.

[3] *aery*: brood.

[4] *eyases*: nestlings, unfledged hawks.

[5] *cry out . . . question*: exclaim in shrill tones on matters in debate (i.e. the quarrel between the poets, known as the Poetomachia, and between public and private theatres, known as The War of the Theatres).

[6] "*common stages*": the child-actors occupied a "private" theatre, and gave performance before a more or less aristocratic audience; the adult actors occupied "common" theatres, and played before the rascality of London. In plays written for the children Ben Jonson had made numerous attacks upon the "common stages," and "common players" — so he called them.

[7] *many wearing rapiers*: gallants.

[8] *goose-quills*: the pens of the dramatists writing for the child-actors, particularly Jonson.

[9] *escoted*: paid.

[10] *quality*: the profession of acting.

say afterwards, if they should grow themselves to "common" players — as it is most like if their means are no better — their writers do them wrong to make them exclaim against their own succession?[1]

ROSENCRANTZ. Faith, there has been much to-do on both sides; and the nation holds it no sin to tarre[2] them to controversy. There was, for a while, no money bid for argument[3] unless the poet and the player went to cuffs in the question.

HAMLET. Is it possible!

GUILDENSTERN. O! there has been much throwing about of brains.

HAMLET. Do the boys carry it away?

ROSENCRANTZ. Ay, that they do, my lord — Hercules and his load,[4] too.

HAMLET. It is not very strange; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those that would make mows[5] at him while my father lived, give twenty, forty, fifty, an hundred ducats a-piece for his picture in little. 'Sblood, there is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out.

[*A flourish within, announcing the arrival of the players at the outer castle gates.*

GUILDENSTERN. There are the players.

HAMLET. Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore.

[1] *succession*: the profession to which they must come when their voices change.

[2] *tarre*: urge on (used of dogs in fight). The "controversy" referred to was between the child-actors and the "common players," and between certain poets, especially Jonson, Dekker, and Marston.

[3] *argument*: plot, a play.

[4] *Hercules and his load*: the Globe Theatre, which had before its door as a sign Hercules bearing the world upon his shoulders.

[5] *mows*: grimaces.

Your hands; come. The appurtenance of welcome is fashion and ceremony; let me comply[1] with you in this garb, lest my extent[2] to the players, which, I tell you, must show fairly outward, should more appear like entertainment than yours. You are welcome. —— But my uncle-father and aunt-mother are deceived.

GUILDENSTERN. In what, my dear lord?

HAMLET. I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw.

Enter POLONIUS.

POLONIUS. Well be with you, gentlemen!

HAMLET. Hark you, Guildenstern; and you, too: at each ear a hearer. [*They gather about him. He whispers.*] That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clouts.

ROSENCRANTZ. Happily he's the second time come to them; for, they say, an old man is twice a child.

HAMLET. I will prophesy he comes to tell me of the players; mark it. [*Aloud.*] You say right, sir; o' Monday morning; 'twas so, indeed.

POLONIUS. My lord, I have news to tell you.

HAMLET. My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius[3] was an actor in Rome ——

POLONIUS. The actors are come hither, my lord!

HAMLET. Buzz, buzz![4]

POLONIUS. Upon my honour!

HAMLET. Then came each actor on his ass.

POLONIUS. The best actors in the world, either for

[1] *comply*: observe the formalities of courtesy.
[2] *extent*: extending of courtesy.
[3] *Roscius*: one of the most famous actors of ancient time.
[4] *buzz*: pooh!

tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light, for the law of writ and the liberty;[1] these are the only men —

HAMLET. O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!

POLONIUS. What a treasure had he, my lord?

HAMLET. Why —

One fair daughter and no more,
The which he loved passing well.

POLONIUS. [*Aside.*] Still on my daughter!

HAMLET. Am I not i' the right, old Jephthah?

POLONIUS. If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I have a daughter, that I love passing well.

HAMLET. Nay, that follows not.

POLONIUS. What follows, then, my lord?

HAMLET. Why —

As by lot, God wot.

And then, you know —

It came to pass, as most like it was.

The first row of the pious chanson[2] will show you more; for look where my abridgment[3] comes.

Enter the Players.

You are welcome, masters! Welcome, all! I am glad to see thee well. Welcome, good friends! O, my old

[1] *law . . . liberty*: possibly "law of writ" refers to the classical rules, especially of the unities, and "the liberties" to freedom from such laws. But Polonius' meaning is far from clear.

[2] *chanson*: the ballad on Jephthah will be found in Child's *English and Scottish Ballads.*

[3] *abridgment*: curtailment of my conversation with you.

friend! [*Taking one by the hand.*] Why, thy face is valanced[1] since I saw thee last: comest thou to beard me in Denmark? [*To the boy-actor.*] What! my young lady and mistress? By'r lady, your ladyship is nearer heaven than when I saw you last, by the altitude of a chopine.[2] Pray God, your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring.[3] — Masters, you are all welcome! We'll e'en to't like French falconers, fly at any thing we see: we'll have a speech straight. [*To the First Player.*] Come, give us a taste of your quality.[4] Come, a passionate speech.

FIRST PLAYER. What speech, my good lord?

HAMLET. I heard thee speak me a speech once, but it was never acted; or, if it was, not above once, for the play, I remember, pleased not the million; 'twas caviare[5] to the general: but it was — as I received it, and others whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine[6] — an excellent play, well digested in the scenes, set down with as much modesty[7] as cunning. I remember one said there were no sallets[8] in the lines to make the matter savoury, nor no matter in the phrase that might indict the author of affectation, but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more hand-

[1] *valanced*: bearded.

[2] *chopine*: a shoe with a thick cork sole.

[3] *cracked . . . ring*: a crack extending within the outer ring of a coin rendered the coin illegal for currency. When the boy's voice cracked, he could no longer act the woman's part in plays.

[4] *quality*: profession of acting.

[5] *caviare*: unpalatable.

[6] *cried in the top of mine*: were superior to mine.

[7] *modesty*: propriety.

[8] *sallets*: spicy sayings (as witty obscenity).

some than fine.[1] One speech in it I chiefly loved; 'twas Æneas' tale to Dido; and thereabout of it especially where he speaks of Priam's slaughter. If it live in your memory, begin at this line — let me see — let me see —

The rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast,[2] —

'Tis not so. — It begins with Pyrrhus. —

The rugged Pyrrhus, he, whose sable arms,[3]
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
Hath now this dread and black complexion smear'd
With heraldry more dismal; head to foot
Now is he total gules,[4] *horridly trick'd*[5]
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Bak'd and impasted with the parching streets[6]
That lend a tyrannous and damned light
To their vile murders. Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus o'er-sized[7] *with coagulate gore,*
With eyes like carbuncles,[8] *the hellish Pyrrhus*
Old grandsire Priam seeks.

So proceed you.

POLONIUS. 'Fore God, my lord, well spoken! with good accent, and good discretion!

FIRST PLAYER. *Anon he finds him*
Striking too short at Greeks; his antique sword,

[1] *more handsome than fine*: more elegant than showy.
[2] *Hyrcanian beast*: the tiger.
[3] *sable arms*: black insignia on his shield.
[4] *gules*: red (a term in heraldry).
[5] *tricked*: painted (a term in heraldry).
[6] *parching streets*: hot burning streets.
[7] *o'er-sized*: smeared over.
[8] *carbuncles*: precious stones of a red, fiery color.

Rebellious[1] *to his arm, lies where it falls,*
Repugnant[2] *to command. Unequal match'd,*
Pyrrhus at Priam drives; in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved[3] *father falls. Then senseless Ilium,*[4]
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus' ear: for lo! his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seem'd i' the air to stick.
So, as a painted tyrant,[5] *Pyrrhus stood,*
And, like a neutral[6] *to his will and matter,*
Did nothing.
But, as we often see, against some storm,
A silence in the heavens, the rack[7] *stand still,*
The bold winds speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region[8]*; so, after Pyrrhus' pause,*
A roused vengeance sets him new a-work.
And never did the Cyclops' hammers fall
On Mars' armour, forg'd for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus' bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.
Out, out, thou strumpet, Fortune! All you gods,

[1] *rebellious*: refusing, through age and weariness, to obey.
[2] *Repugnant*: offering resistance.
[3] *unnerved*: weak, through exhaustion.
[4] *Ilium*: the city of Troy.
[5] *as a painted tyrant*: as a pictured tyrant with uplifted sword. Shakespeare was probably thinking of the painted cloths used to decorate the walls of houses.
[6] *neutral*: one belonging to neither part, indifferent.
[7] *rack*: cloud.
[8] *region*: upper atmosphere.

Break all the spokes and fellies[1] *from her wheel,*
In general synod take away her power,
And bowl the round nave[2] *down the hill of heaven*
As low as to the fiends!

POLONIUS. This is too long.

HAMLET. It shall to the barber's, with your beard. — Prithee, say on: he's for a jig,[3] or a tale of bawdry, or he sleeps. Say on. Come to Hecuba.

FIRST PLAYER. *But who, O! who had seen the mobled*[4] *queen —*

HAMLET. The "mobled queen"?

POLONIUS. That's good! "mobled queen" is good!

FIRST PLAYER. *Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames*
With bisson rheum,[5] *a clout*[6] *upon that head*
Where late the diadem stood, and, for a robe,
About her lank and all o'er-teemed loins[7]
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up —
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steep'd,
'Gainst Fortune's state[8] *would treason have pronounc'd!*
But if the Gods themselves did see her then,
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,

[1] *fellies*: curved pieces of wood forming the circular rim of a wheel.
[2] *nave*: hub.
[3] *jig*: a comic performance, of dancing and singing, by clowns, usually given at the close of a play.
[4] *mobled*: with head muffled in a scarf.
[5] *bisson rheum*: blinding tears.
[6] *clout*: rag.
[7] *all o'er-teemed loins*: exhausted by child-bearing. Shakespeare was thinking of the Homeric legend that Priam was the father of fifty sons and fifty daughters. Of these, various numbers were attributed to Hecuba, who was Priam's second wife.
[8] *state*: government.

The instant burst of clamour that she made —
Unless things mortal move them not at all —
Would have made milch[1] *the burning eyes of heaven,*
And passion in the gods.

POLONIUS. Look! wh'er he has not turned his colour and has tears in's eyes! Prithee, no more.

HAMLET. 'Tis well. I'll have thee speak out the rest soon. [*To* POLONIUS.] Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed?[2] Do you hear, let them be well used; for they are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time: after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

POLONIUS. My lord, I will use them according to their desert.

HAMLET. God's bodikins, man, much better! Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping? Use them after your own honour and dignity: the less they deserve, the more merit is in your bounty. Take them in.

POLONIUS. Come, sirs.

HAMLET. Follow him, friends. We'll hear a play to-morrow. [*Exit* POLONIUS, *followed by the players;* HAMLET *holds back the First Player.*] Dost thou hear me, old friend? can you play *The Murder of Gonzago*?

FIRST PLAYER. Ay, my lord.

HAMLET. We'll ha't to-morrow night. You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in't, could yon not?

FIRST PLAYER. Ay, my lord.

[1] *milch*: moist. [2] *bestowed*: lodged.

HAMLET. Very well. Follow that lord; and look you mock him not. [*Exit First Player.*] [*To* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.] My good friends, I'll leave you till night. You are welcome to Elsinore.

ROSENCRANTZ. Good my lord ——

[HAMLET *waves them away.*

HAMLET. Ay, so; God be wi' ye!

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

Now I am alone.
O, what a rogue and peasant[1] slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function[2] suiting
With forms to his conceit? And all for nothing![3]
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her? What would he do
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have! He would drown the stage with tears,
And cleave the general ear[4] with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,[5]
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.
Yet I ——
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,[6]
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,

[1] *peasant*: base (with the connotation of "serf" or "villein").
[2] *function*: action in general.
[3] *nothing*: a fiction or story.
[4] *general ear*: public audience.
[5] *free*: innocent.
[6] *peak*: mope.

And can say nothing! no, not for a king,
Upon whose property[1] and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made! Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? gives me the lie i' the throat
As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
Ha! ——
Swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
But I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter — or ere this
I should have fatted all the region[2] kites
With this slave's offal! Bloody, bawdy villain!
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless[3] villain!
O, vengeance! ——
Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave
That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
A scullion! — Fie upon't! Foh!
About,[4] my brain! — H'm — I have heard
That guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently[5]
They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these
players
Play something like the murder of my father

[1] *property*: things possessed (as crown, wealth, etc.).
[2] *region*: the upper atmosphere.
[3] *kindless*: unnatural.
[4] *About*: get to work!
[5] *presently*: immediately.

Before mine uncle. I'll observe his looks.
I'll tent him to the quick.[1] If he but blench[2]
I know my course! The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness, and my melancholy —
As he is very potent with such spirits —
Abuses me to damn me. I'll have grounds
More relative[3] than this. The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

[*Exit.*

[1] *tent him to the quick*: probe him to the living, sensitive flesh.
[2] *blench*: flinch his eyes. [3] *relative*: pertinent.

ACT III

Scene I. *The following day. A room in the castle.*

Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, *and* Guildenstern.

KING. And can you by no drift of circumstance[1]
Get from him why he puts on this confusion,
Grating so harshly all his days of quiet
With turbulent and dangerous lunacy?

ROSENCRANTZ. He does confess he feels himself distracted;
But from what cause he will by no means speak.

GUILDENSTERN. Nor do we find him forward to be sounded,
But, with a crafty madness, keeps aloof
When we would bring him on to some confession
Of his true state.

QUEEN. Did he receive you well?

ROSENCRANTZ. Most like a gentleman.

GUILDENSTERN. But with much forcing of his disposition.

ROSENCRANTZ. Niggard of question,[2] but of our demands
Most free in his reply.

QUEEN. Did you assay[3] him
To any pastime?

ROSENCRANTZ. Madam, it so fell out that certain players

[1] *drift of circumstance*: device of beating about the bush.
[2] *Niggard of question*: indisposed to start conversation.
[3] *assay*: tempt.

We o'er-raught[1] on the way; of these we told him,
And there did seem in him a kind of joy
To hear of it. They are about the court,
And, as I think, they have already order
This night to play before him.

POLONIUS. 'Tis most true;
And he beseech'd me to entreat your majesties
To hear and see the matter.

KING. With all my heart; and it doth much content me
To hear him so inclin'd.
Good gentlemen, give him a further edge,
And drive his purpose on to these delights.

ROSENCRANTZ. We shall, my lord.

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

KING. Sweet Gertrude, leave us too;
For we have closely sent for Hamlet hither,
That he, as 'twere by accident, may here
Affront[2] Ophelia.
Her father and myself, lawful espials,
Will so bestow ourselves that, seeing, unseen,
We may of their encounter frankly judge,
And gather by him, as he is behav'd,
If't be the affliction of his love or no
That thus he suffers for.

QUEEN. I shall obey you. —
And for your part, Ophelia, I do wish
That your good beauties be the happy cause
Of Hamlet's wildness; so shall I hope your virtues
Will bring him to his wonted way again,
To both your honours.

OPHELIA. Madam, I wish it may. [*Exit* QUEEN.

[1] *o'er-raught*: overtook. [2] *Affront*: come face to face with.

POLONIUS. Ophelia, walk you here. — Gracious, so please you,
We will bestow[1] ourselves. [*Hands* OPHELIA *a prayer-book.*] Read on this book,
That show of such an exercise[2] may colour
Your loneliness. — We are oft to blame in this,
'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage
And pious action we do sugar o'er
The devil himself.
KING. [*Aside.*] O, 'tis too true!
How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience!
The harlot's cheek, beautied with plastering art,
Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
Than is my deed to my most painted word.
O heavy burden!
POLONIUS. I hear him coming; let's withdraw, my lord.
[*Exeunt* KING *and* POLONIUS *to the gallery above.*

Enter HAMLET.

HAMLET. To be, or not to be; that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea[3] of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them. — To die, to sleep;
No more: and, by a sleep, to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to —— 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd! — To die, to sleep.
To sleep? perchance to dream! Ay, there's the rub!

[1] *bestow*: place in hiding. [2] *exercise*: religious devotion.
[3] *sea*: often used by Shakespeare to indicate merely a vast number, as "sea of joys," "sea of glory."

For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,[1]
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life![2]
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of dispriz'd love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office,[3] and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels[4] bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose bourn[5]
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us all.
And thus the native hue[6] of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment,
With this regard, their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. — Soft you now!
The fair Ophelia? Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins remember'd.

OPHELIA. [*In wounded voice.*] Good my lord,
How does your honour for this many a day?

[1] *mortal coil*: turmoil of life; also the body, conceived of as a coil of rope entwining the soul.
[2] *of so long life*: so long-lived (makes us endure calamity).
[3] *office*: office-holders considered as a type. [4] *fardels*: burdens.
[5] *bourn*: boundary (here "shore"; Shakespeare is thinking of the discovery of the New World).
[6] *native hue*: natural and healthy ruddy complexion.

HAMLET. I humbly thank you, well, well, well.
OPHELIA. My lord, I have remembrances of yours
That I have longed long to re-deliver;
I pray you, now receive them. [*She holds out the jewels.*
HAMLET. No, not I!
I never gave you aught.
OPHELIA. My honour'd lord, you know right well you did;
And, with them, words of so sweet breath compos'd
As made the things more rich. Their perfume lost,
Take these again; for to the noble mind
Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind. —
There, my lord.

[*Holding the jewels at arm's length, she looks at him reproachfully.* POLONIUS, *in his eagerness to see, stirs the curtain of the gallery, and* HAMLET, *out of the corner of his eye, spies the eavesdroppers.*

HAMLET. [*Aside.*] Ha! Ha! —— Are you honest?[1]
OPHELIA. My lord!
HAMLET. Are you fair?
OPHELIA. What means your lordship?
HAMLET. That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty.
OPHELIA. Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce[2] than with honesty?
HAMLET. Ay, truly; for the power of beauty will sooner transform honesty from what it is to a bawd than the force of honesty can translate beauty into his likeness. This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. —— I did love you once.
OPHELIA. Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

[1] *honest*: virtuous, chaste. [2] *commerce*: intercourse.

HAMLET. You should not have believed me! for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock[1] but we shall relish of it. I loved you not.

OPHELIA. I was the more deceived!

HAMLET. Get thee to a nunnery. Why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent[2] honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth? We are arrant knaves, all. Believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. —— Where's your father?

OPHELIA. At home, my lord.

HAMLET. Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool no where but in's own house. Farewell. [*Starts away.*

OPHELIA. O! help him, you sweet heavens!

HAMLET. [*Returning.*] If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery, go![3] Farewell. [*Starts away. Returning.*] Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters[4]

[1] *inoculate our old stock*: engraft the old stem, or plant, of the human race corrupted by the original sin of Adam and Eve.

[2] *indifferent*: fairly, reasonably.

[3] *nunnery*: Hamlet, realizing that he has been deceived by Ophelia, is now using "nunnery" in its well-known meaning of a house of ill fame.

[4] *monsters*: a husband whose wife was false to him was said to

you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too! Farewell. [*Starts away.*

OPHELIA. O heavenly powers, restore him!

HAMLET. [*Returning.*] I have heard of your paintings,[1] too. Well enough; God hath given you one face, and you make yourselves another. You jig, you amble,[2] and you lisp, and nickname God's creatures,[3] and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to! I'll no more on't! it hath made me mad! I say, we will have no more marriages. Those that are married already [*Draws his sword half out*] — all but one — shall live [*Drives his sword back into the scabbard*]; the rest shall keep as they are. To a nunnery, go! [*Exit.*

OPHELIA. O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword;
The expectancy and rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion, and the mould of form,[4]
The observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down!
And I, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That suck'd the honey of his music vows,
Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;
That unmatch'd form and feature of blown[5] youth
Blasted with ecstasy.[6] O! woe is me

have horns on his head; cf. *Othello*, IV, 1, 63: "a horned man's a monster."

[1] *paintings*: Shakespeare always felt a strong repulsion at women's painting their faces; see especially his *Sonnets*.

[2] *amble*: walk in an affected way.

[3] *nickname God's creatures*: call things by names that have obscene suggestion; cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, II, 1, 35: "That kind of fruit as maids call 'medlars' when they laugh alone."

[4] *mould of form*: model of social behavior.

[5] *blown*: in full blossom. [6] *ecstasy*: madness.

To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

Re-enter below KING *and* POLONIUS.

KING. Love! his affections[1] do not that way tend!
Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,
Was not like madness. There's something in his soul
O'er which his melancholy sits on brood;
And I do doubt[2] the hatch and the disclose[3]
Will be some danger. Which for to prevent,
I have in quick determination
Thus set it down: he shall with speed to England,
For the demand of our neglected tribute.
Haply the seas, and countries different,
With variable objects, shall expel
This something-settled matter in his heart,
Whereon his brains still[4] beating puts him thus
From fashion of himself. What think you on't?

POLONIUS. It shall do well; but yet do I believe
The origin and commencement of his grief
Sprung from neglected love. — How now, Ophelia!
You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said;
We heard it all. — My lord, do as you please;
But, if you hold it fit, after the play
Let his queen-mother all alone entreat him
To show his griefs: let her be round with him;
And I'll be plac'd, so please you, in the ear
Of all their conference. If she find[5] him not,
To England send him, or confine him where
Your wisdom best shall think.

[1] *affections*: mental disposition. [2] *doubt*: suspect.
[3] *disclose*: breaking out from the egg.
[4] *still*: continually. [5] *find*: find out, discover.

KING. It shall be so.
Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *The night of the same day. A hall in the castle.*

Enter HAMLET, *and three of the players* (*dressed as* PLAYER-KING, PLAYER-QUEEN, *and* LUCIANUS). HAMLET *holds in his hand the manuscript of the scene he had written.*

HAMLET. Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines. Nor do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently: for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness. O! it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings,[1] who for the most part are capable of nothing but inexplicable dumb shows and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for o'er-doing Termagant.[2] It out-herods Herod.[3] Pray you, avoid it.

FIRST PLAYER. I warrant your honour.

HAMLET. Be not too tame neither; but let your own discretion be your tutor. Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance,

[1] *groundlings*: the rabble, which paid only a penny for admission and stood on the ground in the open-air "yard" of the theater.

[2] *Termagant*: the Saracen god represented in the early drama as a ranting boaster.

[3] *out-herods Herod*: in the early Bible plays, Herod raged with unrestrained violence.

that you o'erstep not the modesty[1] of nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure. Now, this overdone, or come tardy off, though it make the unskilful[2] laugh, cannot but make the judicious grieve; the censure[3] of which one must in your allowance o'erweigh a whole theatre of others. O! there be players that I have seen play — and heard others praise, and that highly — not to speak it profanely,[4] that, neither having the accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted, and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

FIRST PLAYER. I hope we have reformed that indifferently[5] with us.

HAMLET. O, reform it altogether! And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them;[6] for there be of them that will themselves laugh to set on some quantity of barren[7] spectators to laugh too, though in the mean time some necessary question of the play be then to be considered.

[1] *modesty*: propriety. [2] *unskilful*: undiscriminating.
[3] *censure*: judgment, opinion.
[4] *not to speak it profanely*: not intending, in what I am about to say, any disrespect to the Divine Being.
[5] *indifferently*: fairly well.
[6] *clowns . . . them*: clowns were accustomed to extemporize humor to please the groundlings.
[7] *barren*: empty of brains.

That's villanous, and shows a most pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it. Go, make you ready.

[*Exeunt Players.*

Enter POLONIUS, ROSENCRANTZ, *and* GUILDENSTERN.

How now, my lord? will the king hear this piece of work?

POLONIUS. And the queen too, and that presently.[1]

HAMLET. Bid the players make haste. [*Exit* POLONIUS.

Will you two help to hasten them?

ROSENCRANTZ. } We will, my lord.
GUILDENSTERN. }

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

HAMLET. What, ho! Horatio!

Enter HORATIO.

HORATIO. Here, sweet lord, at your service.

HAMLET. Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
As e'er my conversation cop'd withal.[2]

HORATIO. O! my dear lord.

HAMLET. Nay, do not think I flatter;
For what advancement may I hope from thee,
That no revenue hast but thy good spirits
To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flatter'd?
No; let the candied[3] tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant[4] hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou hear?
Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice
And could of men distinguish, her election
Hath seal'd thee for herself; for thou hast been

[1] *presently*: at once.
[2] *conversation cop'd withal*: intercourse with others encountered.
[3] *candied*: flattering. [4] *pregnant*: ready.

As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Hath ta'en with equal thanks; and bless'd are those
Whose blood[1] and judgment are so well co-mingled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee. — Something too much of this.
There is a play to-night before the king.
One scene of it comes near the circumstance
Which I have told thee of my father's death.
I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
Even with the very comment of thy soul
Observe mine uncle! If his occulted guilt
Do not itself unkennel in one speech,
It is a damned ghost that we have seen,
And my imaginations are as foul
As Vulcan's stithy.[2] Give him heedful note!
For I mine eyes will rivet to his face;
And after we will both our judgments join
In censure[3] of his seeming.

HORATIO. Well, my lord,
If he steal aught the whilst this play is playing,
And 'scape detecting, I will pay the theft.

HAMLET. They are coming to the play; I must be idle.[4]
Get you a place.

Danish march playing. Enter attendants carrying torches. To a flourish of trumpets, enter KING, QUEEN, POLONIUS, OPHELIA, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, LORDS *and* LADIES *of*

[1] *blood*: emotional nature.
[2] *stithy*: smithy.
[3] *censure*: a judicial opinion.
[4] *idle*: play the madman.

the Court. The KING *and* QUEEN *take their places in state on an elevated dais; the others group themselves on either side of the dais, the ladies seated on low stools, the gentlemen reclining at the feet of the ladies.*

KING. How fares[1] our cousin Hamlet?

HAMLET. Excellent, i' faith, of the chameleon's dish: I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so!

KING. I have nothing with this answer, Hamlet; these words are not mine.

HAMLET. No, nor mine now. [*Turning to* POLONIUS.] My lord, you played once i' the university, you say?

POLONIUS. That did I, my lord, and was accounted a good actor.

HAMLET. And what did you enact?

POLONIUS. I did enact Julius Cæsar. I was killed i' the Capitol. Brutus killed me.

HAMLET. It was a brute part of him to kill so capital a calf there. [*To* ROSENCRANTZ.] Be the players ready?

ROSENCRANTZ. Ay, my lord; they stay upon your patience.

QUEEN. Come hither, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

HAMLET. No, good mother, here's metal more attractive.

[*Walks over to where* OPHELIA *is seated.*

POLONIUS. [*To the* KING.] O ho! do you mark that?

HAMLET. Lady, shall I lie in your lap?[2]

OPHELIA. No, my lord!

HAMLET. I mean, my head upon your lap?

[1] *fares*: Claudius uses the word in the sense of "does," Hamlet in the sense of "feeds."

[2] *lap*: it was customary at masques and private plays for young gentlemen to recline at the feet of the ladies.

OPHELIA. Ay, my lord.

[*Sits at her feet, and rests his head upon her lap in such a way that he can look directly at the royal pair.*

HAMLET. Do you think I meant country[1] matters?

OPHELIA. I think nothing, my lord.

HAMLET. That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.

OPHELIA. What is, my lord?

HAMLET. "Nothing."[2]

OPHELIA. You are merry, my lord.

HAMLET. Who, I?

OPHELIA. Ay, my lord.

HAMLET. O God, your only jig-maker![3] What should a man do but be merry? for, look you [*Points with his finger at the* QUEEN] how cheerfully my mother looks, and my father died within 's two hours!

OPHELIA. Nay, 'tis twice two months,[4] my lord.

HAMLET. So long! Nay, then, let the Devil wear black, for I'll have a suit of — sables.[5] O heavens! die two months ago, and not forgotten yet! Then there's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year — but, by 'r lady, he must build churches then, or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the hobby-horse, whose epitaph is [*sings*] *For, O! for, O! the hobby-horse is forgot.*

[*Trumpets sound for the Dumb Show. Hautboys play softly while the Dumb Show is being presented.*

[1] *country*: indecent, obscene.

[2] "*nothing*": naught, sexual naughtiness.

[3] *jig-maker*: stage-clown, who amused the rabble with jigs.

[4] *twice two months*: this marks the passage of two months since the close of Act I.

[5] *sables*: black (like the devil). Hamlet's madness still has method in it.

Enter a KING *and a* QUEEN, *very lovingly; the* QUEEN *embracing him. She kneels, and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up, and declines his head upon her neck; lays him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the* KING'S *ears, and exit. The* QUEEN *returns, finds the* KING *dead, and makes passionate action. The Poisoner, with some two or three Mutes, comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The Poisoner wooes the* QUEEN *with gifts. She seems loath and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts his love.*

[*Exeunt; the music ceases.*

OPHELIA. What means this, my lord?

HAMLET. Marry, this is miching mallecho;[1] it means mischief.

OPHELIA. Belike this show imports the argument[2] of the play?

Enter a PLAYER *as* PROLOGUE.

HAMLET. We shall know by this fellow. The players cannot keep counsel; they'll tell all.

OPHELIA. Will he tell us what this show meant?

HAMLET. Ay, or any show that you'll show him. Be not you ashamed to show, he'll not shame to tell you what it means.

OPHELIA. You are naught![3] you are naught! I'll mark the play.

PROLOGUE. *For us and for our tragedy,*
Here stooping to your clemency,
We beg your hearing patiently.

[*Bows, and goes out.*

[1] *miching mallecho*: hidden mischief. [2] *argument*: plot.
[3] *naught*: naughty, obscene.

HAMLET. Is this a prologue, or the posy of a ring?[1]

OPHELIA. 'Tis brief, my lord.

HAMLET. As woman's love!

Enter two PLAYERS, KING *and* QUEEN, *very lovingly, the* QUEEN *embracing him.*

PLAYER KING. *Full thirty times hath Phœbus' cart*[2] *gone round*
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbed ground,[3]
And thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen
About the world have times twelve thirties been,
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN. *So many journeys may the sun and moon*
Make us again count o'er ere love be done!
But, woe is me! you are so sick of late,
So far from cheer and from your former state,
That I distrust[4] *you. Yet, though I distrust,*
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must;
For women's fear and love holds quantity[5] *—*
In neither aught, or in extremity.[6]
Now, what my love is, proof[7] *hath made you know;*
And as my love is siz'd,[8] *my fear is so.*
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

PLAYER KING. *Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too;*
My operant[9] *powers their functions leave to do:*
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
Honour'd, belov'd; and, haply, one as kind
For husband shalt thou —

[1] *posy of a ring*: a very short verse inscribed within a finger-ring.
[2] *Phœbus' cart*: the sun.
[3] *Tellus' orbed ground*: the earth.
[4] *distrust*: am fearful for your health.
[5] *holds quantity*: are proportionate to each other.
[6] *In . . . extremity*: either not at all, or in the extreme.
[7] *proof*: experience of it.
[8] *siz'd*: of such a size.
[9] *operant*: that operate, and so maintain life.

PLAYER QUEEN. *O, confound the rest!*
Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst!
None wed the second but who kill'd the first.

HAMLET. [*Aside.*] Wormwood, wormwood!

PLAYER QUEEN. *The instances*[1] *that second marriage move*
Are base respects[2] *of thrift, but none of love.*
A second time I kill my husband dead
When second husband kisses me in bed!

PLAYER KING. *I do believe you think what now you speak;*
But what we do determine oft we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth, but poor validity;
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
But fall unshaken when they mellow be.
Most necessary 'tis that we forget
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt:
What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.
The violence of either grief or joy
Their own enactures with themselves destroy;
Where joy most revels grief doth most lament;
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.[3]
This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change;
For 'tis a question left us yet to prove
Whe'r love lead fortune or else fortune love.
The great man down, you mark his favourites flies;
The poor advanc'd makes friends of enemies.
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,
For who not needs shall never lack a friend;
And who in want a hollow friend doth try
Directly seasons[4] *him his enemy.*
But — orderly to end where I begun —
Our wills and fates do so contrary run

[1] *instances*: motives. [2] *respects*: considerations.
[3] *accident*: a trifling incident. [4] *seasons*: hardens, matures.

That our devices still are overthrown;
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.
So think thou wilt no second husband wed;
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

PLAYER QUEEN. *Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light!*
Sport and repose lock from me day and night!
To desperation turn my trust and hope!
An anchor's cheer [1] *in prison be my scope!*
Each opposite that blanks [2] *the face of joy*
Meet what I would have well and it destroy!
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife!
If, once a widow, ever I be wife.

HAMLET. If she should break it now!

PLAYER KING. *'Tis deeply sworn! Sweet, leave me here awhile;*
My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile
The tedious day with sleep. [*Lies down.*

PLAYER QUEEN. *Sleep rock thy brain;*
And never come mischance between us twain! [*Exit.*

HAMLET. Madam, how like you this play?

QUEEN. The lady doth protest too much, methinks.

HAMLET. O, but she'll keep her word!

KING. Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in't?

HAMLET. No, no! They do but jest! — poison in jest. No offence i' the world!

KING. What do you call the play?

HAMLET. "The Mouse-trap." Marry, how? Tropically.[3] [*The* KING *shows alarm.*] This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna: Gonzago is the duke's name,

[1] *anchor's cheer*: hermit's slender fare; or, possibly, anchoret's chair.

[2] *opposite that blanks*: contrary event that makes pale.

[3] *Tropically*: by a figure of speech, with a hidden meaning. Note how Hamlet alternately frightens and calms the King.

his wife, Baptista. You shall see anon 'tis a knavish piece of work; but what of that? Your majesty, and we, that have free souls, it touches us not. Let the galled jade wince! our withers are unwrung.

Enter PLAYER *as* LUCIANUS.

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the king.

OPHELIA. You are as good as a chorus,[1] my lord.

HAMLET. I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying.

OPHELIA. You are keen,[2] my lord, you are keen.

HAMLET. It would cost you a groaning[3] to take off my edge.

OPHELIA. Still better, and worse.

HAMLET. So you mis-take your husbands.[4] — Begin, murderer! Pox, leave thy damnable faces, and begin! Come; the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge!

LUCIANUS. *Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing;*
Confederate season, else no creature seeing.
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurp immediately.
[*Pours the poison into the Sleeper's ears.*

HAMLET. He poisons him — i' the garden — for's estate. [*The* KING *shows alarm.*] His name's Gonzago! The story is extant, and writ in very choice Italian.

[1] *chorus*: in Elizabethan plays a chorus was often fetched in to explain what would otherwise not be understood.

[2] *keen*: sharp, bitter.

[3] *groaning*: the pains of child-birth.

[4] *mis-take your husbands*: a parody on the marriage service, according to which women must take their husbands "for better, for worse."

You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of — Gonzago's wife.

OPHELIA. The king rises!

HAMLET. What! frighted with false fire?

QUEEN. How fares my lord?

POLONIUS. Give o'er the play!

KING. Give me some light. Away!

ALL. Lights! lights! lights!

[*Exeunt all except* HAMLET *and* HORATIO.

HAMLET. [*Sings.*]

Why, let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play;
For some must watch, while some must sleep:
So runs the world away.

Would not this, sir [*Waves the manuscript of the scene he had written*], and a forest of feathers, if the rest of my fortunes turn Turk[1] with me, with two Provincial roses[2] on my razed shoes, get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?

HORATIO. Half a share.[3]

HAMLET. A whole one, I. [*Sings.*]

For thou dost know, O Damon[4] *dear,*
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself; and now reigns here
A very, very — pajock.[5]

[1] *turn Turk*: go to the bad.

[2] *Provincial roses*: rosettes as large as the double-rose called the Provincial rose.

[3] *share*: the more important actors in a troupe divided the profits of their acting by a system of shares, the best actors usually enjoying a whole share.

[4] *Damon*: alluding to Horatio; the friendship of Damon and Pythias was famous in literature.

[5] *pajock*: Hamlet started to say "ass," then suddenly checked him-

HORATIO. You might have rimed.

HAMLET. O good Horatio! I'll take the ghost's word for a thousand pound! Didst perceive?

HORATIO. Very well, my lord.

HAMLET. Upon the talk of the poisoning?

HORATIO. I did very well note him.

HAMLET. Ah, ha! — Come, some music! come, the recorders! [*Sings.*]

For if the king like not the comedy,
Why then, belike — he likes it not, perdy.

Come, some music!

Re-enter ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

GUILDENSTERN. Good my lord, vouchsafe me a word with you.

HAMLET. Sir, a whole history!

GUILDENSTERN. The king, sir, —

HAMLET. Ay, sir, what of him?

GUILDENSTERN. Is in his retirement marvellous distempered.

HAMLET. With drink, sir?

GUILDENSTERN. No, my lord, rather with choler.[1]

HAMLET. Your wisdom should show itself more richer to signify this to his doctor; for, for me to put him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler.

GUILDENSTERN. Good my lord, put your discourse into some frame, and start not so wildly from my affair.

HAMLET. I am tame, sir; pronounce.

self and substituted the nonsensical "pajock." The word is not elsewhere found.

[1] *choler*: anger. Hamlet jests on the other meaning of the word, biliousness.

GUILDENSTERN. The queen your mother, in most great affliction of spirit, hath sent me to you —

HAMLET. [*Shaking him by the hand.*] You are welcome!

GUILDENSTERN. Nay, good my lord, this courtesy is not of the right breed. If it shall please you to make me a wholesome answer, I will do your mother's commandment; if not, your pardon[1] and my return shall be the end of my business.

HAMLET. Sir, I cannot.

GUILDENSTERN. What, my lord?

HAMLET. Make you a wholesome answer; my wit's diseased. But, sir, such answer as I can make, you shall command — or, rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore no more, but to the matter. My mother, you say, —

ROSENCRANTZ. Then, thus she says: your behaviour hath struck her into amazement and admiration.[2]

HAMLET. O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother! But is there no sequel at the heels of this mother's admiration? Impart.

ROSENCRANTZ. She desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed.

HAMLET. We shall obey, were she ten times our mother. Have you any further trade[3] with us?

ROSENCRANTZ. My lord, you once did love me.

HAMLET. So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.[4]

ROSENCRANTZ. Good my lord, what is your cause of distemper? You do surely bar the door upon your own

[1] *pardon*: permission to depart.

[2] *admiration*: astonishment.

[3] *trade*: business. Hamlet's choice of the word gives offense to Rosencrantz.

[4] *pickers and stealers*: holding up his ten fingers.

liberty, if you deny your griefs to your friend.

HAMLET. Sir, I lack advancement.

ROSENCRANTZ. How can that be when you have the voice of the king himself for your succession in Denmark?

HAMLET. Ay, sir, but "While the grass grows" — the proverb is something musty.[1]

Enter one with recorders.

O! the recorders: let me see one. [*To* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.] To withdraw with you. [*Takes them aside.*] Why do you go about to recover the wind of me,[2] as if you would drive me into a toil?

GUILDENSTERN. O! my lord, if my duty be too bold, my love is too unmannerly.

HAMLET. I do not well understand that. Will you play upon this pipe?

GUILDENSTERN. My lord, I cannot.

HAMLET. I pray you!

GUILDENSTERN. Believe me, I cannot.

HAMLET. I do beseech you!

GUILDENSTERN. I know no touch of it, my lord.

HAMLET. 'Tis as easy as lying. Govern these ventages[3] with your finger and thumb, give it breath with your mouth, and it will discourse most eloquent music. Look you, these are the stops.

GUILDENSTERN. But these cannot I command to any utterance of harmony; I have not the skill.

[1] *musty*: the old proverb runs: "Whylst grass doth grow, oft starves the silly steed."

[2] *to recover the wind of me*: to keep on the windward side of an animal that is to be driven into a trap, so that it cannot be warned by its sense of smell.

[3] *ventages*: holes in the recorder, a musical instrument something like a flute.

HAMLET. Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me! You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery; you would sound me from my lowest note to the top of my compass. And there is much music, excellent voice, in this little organ, yet cannot you make it speak. 'Sblood! do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? Call me what instrument you will, though you can fret me, you cannot play upon me. —

Enter POLONIUS.

God bless you, sir!

POLONIUS. My lord, the queen would speak with you, and presently.

HAMLET. Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

POLONIUS. By the mass! and 'tis like a camel, indeed.

HAMLET. Methinks it is like a weasel.

POLONIUS. It is backed like a weasel.

HAMLET. Or like a whale?

POLONIUS. Very like a whale!

HAMLET. Then I will come to my mother by and by. [*Aside.*] They fool me to the top of my bent. [*Aloud.*] I will come by and by.[1]

POLONIUS. I will say so.

HAMLET. "By and by" is easily said. — Leave me, friends. [*Exeunt all but* HAMLET.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,[2]

When churchyards yawn, and hell itself breathes out

[1] *by and by*: at once.

[2] *witching time of night*: midnight, when witches are at their foul business.

Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood!
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on! — Soft; now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature! let not ever
The soul of Nero[1] enter this firm bosom!
Let me be cruel, not unnatural;
I will speak daggers to her, but use none.
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites:
How in my words soever she be shent,[2]
To give them seals[3] never, my soul, consent! [*Exit.*

SCENE III. *Later the same night. A room in the castle.*

Enter KING, ROSENCRANTZ, *and* GUILDENSTERN.

KING. I like him not; nor stands it safe with us
To let his madness range. Therefore prepare you;
I your commission will forthwith dispatch,
And he to England shall along with you.
The terms of our estate[4] may not endure
Hazard so dangerous as doth hourly grow
Out of his lunacies.

GUILDENSTERN. We will ourselves provide.
Most holy and religious fear it is
To keep those many many bodies[5] safe
That live and feed upon your majesty.

ROSENCRANTZ. The single and peculiar life[6] is bound
With all the strength and armour of the mind
To keep itself from noyance; but much more

[1] *Nero*: who killed his mother.
[2] *shent*: brought to destruction.
[3] *seals*: execution, as by affixing seals to a document.
[4] *terms of our estate*: circumstances of my exalted rank.
[5] *many bodies*: the subjects of the realm.
[6] *single and peculiar life*: individual and private person.

That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest
The lives of many. The cease[1] of majesty
Dies not alone, but like a gulf[2] doth draw
What's near it with it; it is a massy wheel,
Fix'd on the summit of the highest mount,
To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
Are mortis'd and adjoined; which, when it falls,
Each small annexment, petty consequence,
Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
Did the king sigh, but with a general groan.

KING. Arm you,[3] I pray you, to this speedy voyage;
For we will fetters put upon this fear,
Which now goes too free-footed.

ROSENCRANTZ. }
GUILDENSTERN. } We will haste us.

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

Enter POLONIUS.

POLONIUS. My lord, he's going to his mother's closet:
Behind the arras I'll convey myself
To hear the process.[4] I'll warrant she'll tax him home!
And, as you said — and wisely was it said —
'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother —
Since nature makes them partial — should o'erhear
The speech, of vantage.[5] Fare you well, my liege.
I'll call upon you ere you go to bed
And tell you what I know.

KING. Thanks, dear my lord.

[*Exit* POLONIUS.

O, my offence is rank! it smells to heaven!

[1] *cease*: cessation. [2] *gulf*: whirlpool.
[3] *Arm you*: make preparations. [4] *process*: proceeding.
[5] *of vantage*: from a place of vantage.

It hath the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder! — Pray can I not:
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent;
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. — What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?
And what's in prayer but this two-fold force,
To be forestalled ere we come to fall,
Or pardon'd, being down? Then, I'll look up;
My fault is past. — But, O! what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be, since I am still possess'd
Of those effects for which I did the murder,
My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice;
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law: but 'tis not so above;
There, is no shuffling; there, the action lies[1]
In his true nature, and we ourselves compell'd
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults
To give in evidence. — What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can? What can it not?
Yet what can it, when one can not repent! —
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!

[1] *lies*: a legal term, is admissible or sustainable.

O limed[1] soul, that, struggling to be free,
Art more engaged! Help, angels! —— Make assay;
Bow, stubborn knees! and heart with strings of steel
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
All may be well. [*Kneels.*

Enter HAMLET, *behind.*

HAMLET. Now might I do it pat, now he is praying. —
And now I'll do't. [*Slowly draws his sword.*] And so he goes to heaven;
And so am I reveng'd. — That would be scann'd:[2]
A villain kills my father; and, for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven. ——
Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge!
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown,[3] as flush as May;
And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?
But in our circumstance and course of thought
'Tis heavy with him. And am I, then, reveng'd,
To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and season'd for his passage?
No! —— [*Sheathes his sword.*
Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent![4]
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't,
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damn'd and black

[1] *limed*: caught as with bird-lime.
[2] *scann'd*: carefully scrutinized.
[3] *broad blown*: in full bloom.
[4] *hent*: intention, design.

As hell, whereto it goes! — My mother stays. —
This physic but prolongs thy sickly days! [*Exit.*

KING. [*Rising.*] My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go. [*Exit.*

SCENE IV. *A few moments later. The* QUEEN'S *private apartment.*

Enter QUEEN *and* POLONIUS.

POLONIUS. He will come straight. Look you lay home to him.
Tell him his pranks have been too broad to bear with;
And that your Grace hath screen'd and stood between
Much heat and him. I'll silence me e'en here.
Pray you, be round with him!

HAMLET. [*Within.*] Mother, mother, mother!

QUEEN. I'll warrant you;
Fear me not. Withdraw; I hear him coming.

[POLONIUS *hides behind the arras.*

Enter HAMLET.

HAMLET. Now, mother, what's the matter?

QUEEN. Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended.

HAMLET. Mother, you[1] have my father much offended.

QUEEN. Come, come! you answer with an idle tongue.

HAMLET. Go, go! you question with a wicked tongue.

QUEEN. Why, how now — Hamlet!

HAMLET. What's the matter now?

QUEEN. Have you forgot me?

HAMLET. No, by the rood,[2] not so.

[1] *you*: observe that Hamlet shifts from the affectionate "thou" to the formal and distant "you."

[2] *rood*: cross.

You are "the Queen," your husband's brother's wife,
And — would it were not so! — you are my mother!

QUEEN. Nay then, I'll set those to you that can speak.

[*Starts toward the door.* HAMLET *seizes her, and forces her into a chair.*

HAMLET. Come, come; and sit you down. You shall not budge! [*She struggles.*
You go not, till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

QUEEN. What wilt thou do? Thou wilt not murder me?
Help, help, ho!

POLONIUS. [*Behind.*] What, ho! Help! Help! Help!

HAMLET. [*Draws.*] How now, a rat?[1] Dead, for a ducat! dead! [*Makes a pass through the arras.*

POLONIUS. [*Behind.*] O, I am slain!

QUEEN. O me! what hast thou done?

HAMLET. Nay, I know not. — Is it the king?

QUEEN. O! what a rash and bloody deed is this!

HAMLET. A bloody deed! almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother.

QUEEN. As kill a king!

HAMLET. Ay, lady, 'twas my word.

[*Lifts up the arras and discovers* POLONIUS.

Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool! Farewell!
I took thee for thy better. Take thy fortune;
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger. —
Leave wringing of your hands! Peace! Sit you down!

[*He forces her again into the chair.*

And let me wring your heart; for so I shall,

[1] *rat*: rats were frequently heard behind the hangings in Elizabethan houses.

If it be made of penetrable[1] stuff,
If damned custom have not brass'd it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense.
QUEEN. What have I done, that thou dar'st wag thy tongue
In noise so rude against me?
HAMLET. Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty!
Calls virtue hypocrite! takes off the rose[2]
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister[3] there! makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths! O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction[4] plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words! Heaven's face doth glow;
Yea, this solidity and compound mass,[5]
With tristful visage, as against the doom,
Is thought-sick at the act!
QUEEN. Ay me, what act,
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?[6]
HAMLET. Look here, upon this picture, and on this,
[*He points to two portraits hanging on the wall.*
The counterfeit presentment[7] of two brothers.
See, what a grace was seated on this brow!

[1] *penetrable*: capable of being penetrated by feeling.
[2] *rose*: beauty.
[3] *blister*: women convicted of adultery were branded on the forehead (cf. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*).
[4] *contraction*: the act of forming the marriage contract.
[5] *solidity . . . mass*: the earth, which is supposed to grow sick and feverish at Doomsday.
[6] *index*: table of contents.
[7] *counterfeit presentment*: painted portraits. Usually portraits were concealed by a small curtain. Possibly Hamlet snatched aside the curtains at the words "this" and "this."

Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself,
An eye like Mars, to threaten and command,
A station[1] like the herald Mercury
New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill:
A combination and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal
To give the world assurance of a man.
This was your husband. Look you now, what follows.
Here is your husband, like a mildew'd ear
Blasting his wholesome brother! Have you eyes?
Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed,
And batten[2] on this moor? Ha! have you eyes?
You cannot call it love; for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgment; and what judgment
Would step from this to this? Sense,[3] sure, you have,
Else could you not have motion; but, sure, that sense
Is apoplex'd: for madness would not err,
Nor sense to ecstasy[4] was ne'er so thrall'd
But it reserv'd some quantity of choice
To serve in such a difference! What devil was't
That thus hath cozen'd you at hoodman-blind?[5]
Eyes without feeling, feeling without sight,
Ears without hands or eyes, smelling sans all,
Or but a sickly part of one true sense
Could not so mope.[6]
O shame! Where is thy blush? Rebellious hell,

[1] *station*: posture in standing. [2] *batten*: feed gluttonously.
[3] *sense*: the faculty of perception, including the five senses.
[4] *ecstasy*: madness, insanity.
[5] *hoodman-blind*: blindman's buff. [6] *mope*: be so stupid.

If thou canst mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax
And melt in her own fire! proclaim no shame
When the compulsive ardour gives the charge,
Since frost itself as actively doth burn,
And reason panders will.[1]

QUEEN. O Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained[2] spots
As will not leave their tinct.

HAMLET. Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed[3] bed!
Stew'd[4] in corruption! honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty! —

QUEEN. O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in mine ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet!

HAMLET. A murderer! and a villain!
A slave, that is not twentieth part the tithe
Of your precedent lord! A vice[5] of kings!
A cutpurse of the empire and the rule,
That from a shelf the precious diadem stole,
And put it in his pocket! —

QUEEN. No more!

HAMLET. A king of shreds and patches! —

Enter GHOST.

Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards! — What would your gracious figure?

[1] *panders will*: ministers to the gratification of lust.
[2] *grained*: dyed in grain. [3] *enseamed*: loaded with grease.
[4] *Stew'd*: covered with perspiration.
[5] *vice*: the clown in old moralities.

QUEEN. Alas, he's mad!

HAMLET. Do you not come your tardy son to chide,
That, laps'd in time and passion,[1] lets go by
The important acting of your dread command?
O, say!

GHOST. Do not forget! This visitation
Is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose. —
But, look; amazement on thy mother sits.
O, step between her and her fighting soul.
Conceit[2] in weakest bodies strongest works.
Speak to her, Hamlet.

HAMLET. How is it with you, lady?

QUEEN. Alas, how is't with you,
That you do bend your eye on vacancy,
And with the incorporal air do hold discourse?
Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep;
And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,[3]
Starts up and stands an end. O, gentle son,
Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper
Sprinkle cool patience. — Whereon do you look?

HAMLET. On him! on him! Look you, how pale he glares!
His form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to stones,
Would make them capable.[4] [*To the* GHOST.] Do not look upon me;
Lest with this piteous action you convert

[1] *laps'd in time and passion*: delaying while indulging in mere passion.

[2] *Conceit*: imagination.

[3] *life in excrements*: hair-like mould often seen growing on manure.

[4] *capable*: an echo of the Biblical phrase: "The very stones should cry out."

My stern effects:[1] then what I have to do
Will want true colour; tears perchance for blood.
QUEEN. To whom do you speak this?
HAMLET. Do you see nothing there?
QUEEN. Nothing at all; yet all that is I see.
HAMLET. Nor did you nothing hear?
QUEEN. No; nothing but ourselves.
HAMLET. Why, look you! there! Look, how it steals away!
My father, in his habit[2] as he liv'd!
Look! where he goes, even now, out at the portal.
[*Exit* GHOST.
QUEEN. This is the very coinage of your brain.
This bodiless creation[3] ecstasy
Is very cunning in.
HAMLET. Ecstasy!
My pulse, as yours, doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music. It is not madness
That I have utter'd. Bring me to the test,[4]
And I the matter will re-word which madness
Would gambol from. Mother, for love of grace[5]
Lay not that flattering unction[6] to your soul,
That not your trespass but my madness speaks;
It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven;
Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;[7]
And do not spread the compost on the weeds

[1] *effects*: action. [2] *habit*: dress.
[3] *bodiless creation*: hallucination.
[4] *the test*: of rephrasing a sentence involving abstract thought.
[5] *grace*: soul salvation. [6] *unction*: salve.
[7] *avoid what is to come*: reform your future conduct.

To make them ranker. Forgive me this my virtue;[1]
For in the fatness of these pursy times
Virtue itself of vice must pardon beg,
Yea, curb[2] and woo for leave to do him good.
QUEEN. [*Burying her face in her hands.*] O Hamlet! thou
hast cleft my heart in twain!
HAMLET. O, throw away the worser part of it,
And live the purer with the other half.
[*He stands looking down at her as she sits weeping.*
Good night. But go not to mine uncle's bed;
Assume[3] a virtue, if you have it not.
That monster, custom, who all sense[4] doth eat,
Of habits devil, is angel yet in this,
That to the use of actions fair and good
He likewise gives a frock or livery
That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night;
And that shall lend a kind of easiness
To the next abstinence; the next more easy:
For use almost can change the stamp of nature,
And either [master] the devil or throw him out
With wondrous potency. — Once more, good-
night.
And when you are desirous to be bless'd,
I'll blessing beg of you. For this same lord,
I do repent: but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister.
I will bestow him, and will answer well

[1] *my virtue*: my assumption of virtue in thus preaching to you.
[2] *curb*: bow as in petition.
[3] *Assume*: pretend that you have, act on the assumption that you have.
[4] *sense*: sensibility.

The death I gave him. — So, again, good-night.
[*Aside.*] I must be cruel only to be kind;
Thus bad begins, and worse remains behind.
[*Aloud.*] One word more, good lady.

QUEEN. [*Looking up.*] What shall I do?

HAMLET. Not this, by no means, that I bid you do:
Let the bloat king tempt you again to bed;
Pinch wanton on your cheek; call you his mouse;[1]
And let him, for a pair of reechy[2] kisses,
Or paddling in your neck with his damn'd fingers,
Make you to ravel all this matter out,
That I essentially am not in madness,
But mad in craft. 'Twere good you let him know.
For who that's but a queen, fair, sober, wise,
Would from a paddock,[3] from a bat, a gib,[4]
Such dear concernings hide? who would do so?
No; in despite of sense and secrecy,
Unpeg the basket on the house's top,
Let the birds fly; and, like the famous ape,
To try conclusions,[5] in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down!

QUEEN. Be thou assur'd, if words be made of breath,
And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
What thou hast said to me!

HAMLET. I must to England; you know that?

QUEEN. Alack!
I had forgot: 'tis so concluded on.

HAMLET. There's letters seal'd; and my two schoolfellows —

[1] *mouse*: a common term of endearment. [2] *reechy*: dirty.
[3] *paddock*: toad. [4] *gib*: a male cat (a term of contempt).
[5] *try conclusions*: see what will happen. The story Shakespeare alludes to is now lost.

Whom I will trust as I will adders fang'd —
They bear the mandate. They must sweep my way,
And marshal me to knavery. Let it work!
For 'tis the sport to have the enginer[1]
Hoist with his own petar:[2] and it shall go hard
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon. O! 'tis most sweet,
When in one line two crafts directly meet.
[*Looking at* POLONIUS.
This man shall set me packing.
I'll lug the guts into the neighbour room. —
Mother, good-night. — Indeed this counsellor
Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
Who was in life a foolish prating knave.
[*Seizing the body.*
Come, sir, to draw toward an end with you. —
Good-night, mother!

[*Exeunt severally;* HAMLET *dragging in the body of* POLONIUS.

SCENE V. *A few moments later. A room in the castle.*

Enter QUEEN *to* KING, ROSENCRANTZ, *and* GUILDENSTERN.

KING. [*To the* QUEEN.] There's matter in these sighs, these profound heaves.
You must translate;[3] 'tis fit we understand them.
Where is your son?

QUEEN. [*To* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.] Bestow this place on us a little while.

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

[1] *enginer*: one who constructs military engines.
[2] *petar*: an engine of war, bell-shaped, filled with gunpowder, and exploded with a fuse.
[3] *translate*: explain.

Ah, my good lord, what have I seen to-night!
KING. What, Gertrude? How does Hamlet?
QUEEN. Mad as the sea and wind when both contend
Which is the mightier! In his lawless fit,
Behind the arras hearing something stir,
Whips out his rapier, cries, "A rat! a rat!"
And, in this brainish apprehension,[1] kills
The unseen good old man.
KING. O heavy deed! —
It had been so with us had we been there!
His liberty is full of threats to all,
To you yourself, to us, to every one.
Alas! how shall this bloody deed be answered?
It will be laid to us, whose providence
Should have kept short, restrain'd, and out of haunt,
This mad young man. But so much was our love,
We would not understand what was most fit,
But, like the owner of a foul disease,
To keep it from divulging, let it feed
Even on the pith of life. Where is he gone?
QUEEN. To draw apart the body he hath kill'd;
O'er whom his very madness, like some ore
Among a mineral[2] of metals base,
Shows itself pure: he weeps for what is done.
KING. O Gertrude, come away!
The sun no sooner shall the mountains touch
But we will ship him hence; and this vile deed
We must, with all our majesty and skill,
Both countenance[3] and excuse. — Ho! Guildenstern!

[1] *brainish apprehension*: brainsick notion (i.e. that there was a rat behind the hangings).
[2] *mineral*: any substance obtained by mining.
[3] *countenance*: sanction, give support to.

Re-enter ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

Friends both, go join you with some further aid:
Hamlet in madness hath Polonius slain,
And from his mother's closet hath he dragg'd him.
Go seek him out; speak fair, and bring the body
Into the chapel. I pray you, haste in this.

[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.

Come, Gertrude; we'll call up our wisest friends,
And let them know both what we mean to do,
And what's untimely done: [so, haply, slander,]
Whose whisper o'er the world's diameter,[1]
As level as the cannon to his blank[2]
Transports his poison'd shot, may miss our name
And hit the woundless air. O, come away!
My soul is full of discord and dismay. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI. *A few moments later. A hall in the castle.*

Enter HAMLET.

HAMLET. Safely stowed.

ROSENCRANTZ. } [*Within.*] Hamlet! Lord Hamlet!
GUILDENSTERN. }

HAMLET. What noise? Who calls on Hamlet?
O, here they come.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, *and Attendants.*

ROSENCRANTZ. What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

HAMLET. Compounded it with dust, whereto 'tis kin.

ROSENCRANTZ. Tell us where 'tis, that we may take it thence
And bear it to the chapel.

[1] *diameter*: whole extent.
[2] *blank*: the white center of the target.

HAMLET. Do not believe it.

ROSENCRANTZ. Believe what?

HAMLET. That I can keep your counsel and not mine own. Besides, to be demanded of a sponge! what replication should be made by the son of a king?

ROSENCRANTZ. Take you me for a sponge, my lord?

HAMLET. Ay, sir, that soaks up the king's countenance,[1] his rewards, his authorities.[2] But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw; first mouthed, to be, last, swallowed: when he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you — and, sponge, you shall be dry again.

ROSENCRANTZ. I understand you not, my lord.

HAMLET. I am glad of it: "a knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear."

ROSENCRANTZ. My lord, you must tell us where the body is, and go with us to the king.

HAMLET. The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body.[3] The king is a thing —

GUILDENSTERN. A thing, my lord!

HAMLET. Of nothing. Bring me to him. Hide fox, and all after![4]

[*Exit* HAMLET *running*, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN *and Attendants following*.

[1] *countenance*: favor, patronage.

[2] *authorities*: delegated powers.

[3] *king . . . body*: apparently Hamlet is talking nonsense in order to deceive the men who are to take him under surveillance to England.

[4] *Hide fox*: the well-known child's game, sometimes called "Follow the leader."

SCENE VII. *A few moments later. A room in the castle.*

Enter KING, *attended.*

KING. I have sent to seek him, and to find the body.
How dangerous is it that this man goes loose!
Yet must not we put the strong law on him:
He's lov'd of the distracted multitude,
Who like not in their judgment, but their eyes;
And where 'tis so, the offender's scourge is weigh'd,
But never the offence. To bear all smooth and even,
This sudden sending him away must seem
Deliberate pause. Diseases desperate grown
By desperate appliance are reliev'd,
Or not at all.

Enter ROSENCRANTZ.

How now! what hath befall'n?

ROSENCRANTZ. Where the dead body is bestow'd, my lord,
We cannot get from him.

KING. But where is he?

ROSENCRANTZ. Without, my lord, guarded, to know your pleasure.

KING. Bring him before us.

ROSENCRANTZ. Ho, Guildenstern! bring in my lord.

Enter GUILDENSTERN *with* HAMLET *guarded.*

KING. Now, Hamlet, where's Polonius?

HAMLET. At supper.

KING. At supper! Where?

HAMLET. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten: a certain convocation of politic worms[1] are e'en

[1] *convocation . . . worms*: a gird at Polonius' attempts at crafty policy, and an allusion to the famous convocation known as the Diet of Worms.

at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service;[1] two dishes, but to one table: that's the end.

KING. Alas, alas!

HAMLET. A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm.

KING. What dost thou mean by this?

HAMLET. Nothing, but to show you how a king may go a progress[2] through the guts of a beggar.

KING. Where is Polonius?

HAMLET. In heaven. Send thither to see; if your messenger find him not there, seek him i' the other place yourself. But, indeed, if you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

KING. [*To some Attendants.*] Go seek him there.

HAMLET. He will stay till you come! [*Exeunt Attendants.*

KING. Hamlet, this deed, for thine especial safety —
Which we do tender,[3] as we dearly grieve
For that which thou hast done — must send thee hence
With fiery quickness. Therefore prepare thyself;
The bark is ready, and the wind at help,
The associates tend, and every thing is bent
For England.

HAMLET. For England?

[1] *variable service*: variety in food.

[2] *progress*: a technical term applied to the magnificent journeys of royalty through the country.

[3] *tender*: take tender care of.

KING. Ay, Hamlet.

HAMLET. Good!

KING. So is it, if thou knew'st our purposes.

HAMLET. I see a cherub that sees them![1] [*To* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.] But, come; for England! [*To the* KING.] Farewell, dear mother.

KING. Thy loving father, Hamlet.

HAMLET. My mother: father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh, and so, my mother. [*To* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.] Come; for England! [*Exit.*

KING. Follow him at foot. Tempt him with speed aboard.
Delay it not; I'll have him hence to-night.
Away; for every thing is seal'd and done
That else leans on the affair. Pray you, make haste.
[*Exeunt* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.
And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught —
As my great power thereof may give thee sense,
Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red
After the Danish sword, and thy free awe
Pays homage to us — thou mayst not coldly set[2]
Our sovereign process;[3] which imports at full,
By letters conjuring[4] to that effect,
The present[5] death of Hamlet. Do it, England!
For like the hectic[6] in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps,[7] my joys were ne'er begun. [*Exit.*

[1] *cherub that sees them*: playing on the proverbial, "I see a little bird that sees" (cf. *II Henry IV*, V, v, 113).
[2] *set*: disregard. [3] *process*: command.
[4] *conjuring*: solemnly charging. [5] *present*: instant.
[6] *hectic*: fever. [7] *my haps*: fortunes that fall to me.

SCENE VIII. *Early the following morning. The highway leading from the port.*

Enter FORTINBRAS, *a Captain, and a troop of soldiers, with drums, marching.*

FORTINBRAS. Go, captain; from me greet the Danish king;
Tell him that, by his licence, Fortinbras
Claims the conveyance of a promis'd march
Over his kingdom. You know the rendezvous.
If that his majesty would aught with us,
We shall express our duty in his eye;
And let him know so.

CAPTAIN. I will do't, my lord.

FORTINBRAS. [*To the soldiers.*] Go softly[1] on.

As FORTINBRAS *and his troop of soldiers march out, enter* HAMLET, ROSENCRANTZ, GUILDENSTERN, *and Attendants bearing luggage, on their way to the port.* HAMLET *stops the Captain.*

HAMLET. Good sir, whose powers are these?

CAPTAIN. They are of Norway, sir.

HAMLET. How purpos'd, sir, I pray you?

CAPTAIN. Against some part of Poland.

HAMLET. Who commands them, sir?

CAPTAIN. The nephew to old Norway, Fortinbras.

HAMLET. Goes it against the main[2] of Poland, sir,
Or for some frontier?

CAPTAIN. Truly to speak, and with no addition,[3]
We go to gain a little patch of ground
That hath in it no profit but the name.
To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm[4] it;
Nor will it yield to Norway or the Pole

[1] *softly*: slowly. [2] *main*: mainland.
[3] *addition*: circumlocution. [4] *farm*: rent.

A ranker rate[1] should it be sold in fee.[2]

HAMLET. Why, then the Polack never will defend it.

CAPTAIN. Yes, 'tis already garrison'd.

HAMLET. Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats
Will not debate the question of this straw!
This is the imposthume of much wealth and peace,
That inward breaks, and shows no cause without
Why the man dies. — I humbly thank you, sir.

CAPTAIN. God be wi' you, sir. [*Exit.*

ROSENCRANTZ. Will't please you go, my lord?

HAMLET. I'll be with you straight. Go a little before.

[*Exeunt all except* HAMLET.

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market[3] of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.
Sure He that made us with such large discourse,[4]
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To fust[5] in us unus'd. Now, whe'r it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event —
A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward — I do not know
Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do,"
Sith I have cause, and will,[6] and strength, and means[7]
To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me.

[1] *ranker rate*: greater sum.
[2] *in fee*: with absolute possession.
[3] *market*: disposal.
[4] *discourse*: faculty of reasoning.
[5] *fust*: grow mouldy.
[6] *will*: desire.
[7] *means*: opportunity.

Witness this army of such mass and charge[1]
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit, with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare —
Even for an egg-shell! Rightly to be great
Is not to stir without great argument,[2]
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
When honour's at the stake. How stand I, then,
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,
Excitements of my reason and my blood,
And let all sleep? while, to my shame, I see
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,
That, for a fantasy and trick[3] of fame,
Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
Which is not tomb enough and continent[4]
To hide the slain! O, from this time forth,
My thoughts be bloody, or be nothing worth!

[*Exit.*

[1] *charge*: cost.
[2] *argument*: matter for contention, cause.
[3] *trick*: toy, trifle.
[4] *continent*: receptacle.

ACT IV

SCENE I. *Several weeks later. A room in the castle.*
Enter QUEEN, HORATIO, *and a* GENTLEMAN.

QUEEN. I will not speak with her.
GENTLEMAN. She is importunate; indeed, distract.
Her mood will needs be pitied.
QUEEN. What would she have?
GENTLEMAN. She speaks much of her father; says she hears
There's tricks i' the world; and hems, and beats her heart;
Spurns enviously[1] at straws; speaks things in doubt,
That carry but half sense. Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection;[2] they aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts;
Which, as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.[3]
HORATIO. 'Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew
Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds.
QUEEN. Let her come in.
[*Exeunt* HORATIO *and* GENTLEMAN.
To my sick soul — as sin's true nature is —
Each toy[4] seems prologue to some great amiss.

[1] *Spurns enviously*: kicks spitefully.
[2] *collection*: putting things together and drawing inferences therefrom.
[3] *unhappily*: mischievously.
[4] *toy*: trifle.

So full of artless jealousy[1] is guilt,
It spills[2] itself in fearing to be spilt.

Re-enter HORATIO *and* GENTLEMAN *with* OPHELIA, *distracted, holding a lute, her hair down.*

OPHELIA. Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?

QUEEN. How now, Ophelia!

OPHELIA. [*Sings.*]

How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff,[3]
And his sandal shoon.[4]

QUEEN. Alas, sweet lady, what imports this song?

OPHELIA. Say you? Nay, pray you, mark: [*Sings.*]

He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone;
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

O, ho!

QUEEN. Nay, but, Ophelia, —

OPHELIA. Pray you, mark: [*Sings.*]

White his shroud as the mountain snow,

Enter KING.

QUEEN. [*Aside to him.*] Alas, look here, my lord!

OPHELIA. *Larded*[5] *with sweet flowers;*
Which bewept to the grave did not go[6]
With true-love showers.

KING. How do you, pretty lady?

[1] *artless jealousy*: unskilful suspicion. [2] *spills*: destroys.

[3] *cockle hat and staff*: signs of the pilgrim. The male lover was conventionally represented as a pilgrim, his lady as the saint; cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, I. v.

[4] *shoon*: shoes. [5] *Larded*: garnished.

[6] *did not go*: so all the original editions. The fact that the meter

OPHELIA. Well, God 'ild you. They say the owl was a baker's daughter.[1] Lord! we know what we are, but know not what we may be. God be at your table!

KING. Conceit upon her father.

OPHELIA. Pray you, let's have no words of this; but when they ask you what it means, say you this:

[*Sings.*] *To-morrow is Saint Valentine's day,*
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window
To be your Valentine.

Then up he rose, and donn'd his clothes,
And dupp'd[2] *the chamber-door;*
Let in the maid, that out a maid
Never departed more.

KING. Pretty Ophelia!

OPHELIA. Indeed, la, without an oath, I'll make an end on't: [*Sings.*]

By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't, if they come to't;
By Cock they are to blame.

Quoth she, "before you tumbled me,
You promis'd me to wed."
"So would I ha' done, by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed."

is violated serves merely to emphasize "not," with its obvious allusion to the secret burial of Polonius. This is one of Ophelia's "doubtful" speeches, which Horatio feared might "strew dangerous conjectures."

[1] *baker's daughter*: there were several old ballads on the story of how a certain baker's daughter was turned into an owl for denying bread to Jesus.

[2] *dupp'd*: opened.

KING. How long hath she been thus?

OPHELIA. I hope all will be well. We must be patient: but I cannot choose but weep to think they should lay him i' the cold ground. My brother shall know of it. And so, I thank you for your good counsel. — Come; my coach! — Good-night, ladies. Good-night, sweet ladies. Good-night! Good-night! [*Exit.*

KING. Follow her close; give her good watch, I pray you. [*Exeunt* HORATIO *and* GENTLEMAN.

O! this is the poison of deep grief; it springs
All from her father's death. O Gertrude, Gertrude!
When sorrows come, they come not single spies,
But in battalions. First, her father slain;
Next, your son gone — and he most violent author
Of his own just remove; the people muddied,
Thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers
For good Polonius' death — and we have done but greenly
In hugger-mugger[1] to inter him; poor Ophelia
Divided from herself and her fair judgment,
Without the which we are pictures, or mere beasts;
Last, and as much containing as all these,
Her brother is in secret come from France,
Feeds on his wonder, keeps himself in clouds,[2]
And wants not buzzers to infect his ear
With pestilent speeches of his father's death,
Wherein necessity, of matter beggar'd,
Will nothing stick our person to arraign
In ear and ear. O, my dear Gertrude, this,

[1] *hugger-mugger*: secretly.
[2] *in clouds*: wrapped in dark suspicions.

Like to a murdering-piece,[1] in many places
Gives me superfluous death.

[*A noise within of shouts and clashing swords.*

QUEEN. Alack! what noise is this?

KING. Where are my Switzers? Let them guard the door!

Enter a GENTLEMAN *in haste.*

What is the matter?

GENTLEMAN. Save yourself, my lord!
The ocean, overpeering of his list,[2]
Eats not the flats with more impetuous haste
Than young Laertes, in a riotous head,[3]
O'erbears your officers. The rabble call him lord,
And, as the world were now but to begin,
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratifiers and props of every word,
They cry, "Choose we; Laertes shall be king!"
Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
"Laertes shall be king! Laertes king!"

QUEEN. How cheerfully on the false trail they cry!
O, this is counter,[4] you false Danish dogs!

[*Noise within of crashing doors.*

KING. The doors are broke.

Enter LAERTES, *with drawn sword, a mob of Danes at his back.*

LAERTES. Where is the king? — Sirs, stand you all without.

[1] *murdering-piece*: a cannon loaded with many small projectiles which scattered.

[2] *list*: usually a staked enclosure, but here, apparently, in the sense of dike (as the dikes of Holland).

[3] *head*: mob.

[4] *counter*: a hunting term, when dogs follow the trail in the wrong direction.

DANES. No, let's come in!

LAERTES. I pray you, give me leave.

DANES. We will! we will!

LAERTES. I thank you. Keep the door.

[*The mob retires.* LAERTES, *brandishing his sword, confronts the* KING.

O thou vile king!
Give me my father!

QUEEN. Calmly, good Laertes.

LAERTES. That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard!
Cries cuckold[1] to my father! brands the harlot
Even here, between the chaste unsmirched brow
Of my true mother! —

[*The* QUEEN *throws her arms about* LAERTES, *and tries to hold him.*

KING. What is the cause, Laertes,
That thy rebellion looks so giant-like? —
Let him go, Gertrude; do not fear[2] our person:
There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will. — Tell me, Laertes,
Why thou art thus incens'd. — Let him go, Gertrude. —
Speak, man.

LAERTES. Where's my father?

KING. Dead.

QUEEN. But not by him.

KING. Let him demand his fill.

LAERTES. How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with!

[1] *cuckold*: a husband whose wife has been disloyal.
[2] *fear*: fear for.

To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation! To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence!
Let come what comes, only I'll be reveng'd,
Most throughly, for my father!

KING. Who shall stay you?

LAERTES. My will, not all the world!
And for my means, I'll husband them so well
They shall go far with little.

KING. Good Laertes,
If you desire to know the certainty
Of your dear father's death, is't writ in your revenge
That, swoopstake,[1] you will draw both friend and foe,
Winner and loser?

LAERTES. None but his enemies.

KING. Will you know them then?

LAERTES. To his good friends thus wide I'll ope my arms,
And, like the kind life-rendering pelican,[2]
Repast them with my blood.

KING. Why, now you speak
Like a good child and a true gentleman.
That I am guiltless of your father's death,
And am most sensibly in grief for it,
It shall as level to your judgment pierce
As day does to your eye.

DANES. [*Within.*] Let her come in.

[1] *swoopstake*: a game in which the winner sweeps all the stakes; hence, indiscriminately.

[2] *life-rendering pelican*: it was formerly supposed that the pelican fed its young with its own blood.

LAERTES. How now! what noise is that?

Re-enter OPHELIA, *as before.*

O heat, dry up my brains! Tears seven times salt
Burn out the sense and virtue of mine eye!
By heaven, thy madness shall be paid by weight,
Till our scale turn the beam! O rose of May!
Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia! —
O heavens! is't possible a young maid's wits
Should be as mortal as an old man's life?
Nature is fine in love, and where 'tis fine
It sends some precious instance[1] of itself
After the thing it loves.

OPHELIA. [*Sings.*]

They bore him barefac'd on the bier;
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;
And in his grave rain'd many a tear.
Fare you well, my dove!

LAERTES. Hadst thou thy wits, and didst persuade revenge,
It could not move thus.

OPHELIA. You must sing, "*A-down a-down!*" and you, "*Call him a-down-a!*" O how the wheel[2] becomes it! It is the false steward that stole his master's daughter.

LAERTES. This nothing's more than matter.

OPHELIA. [*To* LAERTES.] There's rosemary;[3] that's for remembrance: pray, love, remember. And there is pansies;[4] that's for thoughts.

[1] *instance*: token.

[2] *wheel*: possibly "refrain," but no other use of the word in this sense has been discovered.

[3] *rosemary*: regularly used as the emblem of remembrance. In the distribution of flowers Ophelia is again behaving in a way that might breed "dangerous conjectures."

[4] *pansies*: the emblem of thought or melancholy (French *pensées*).

LAERTES. A document[1] in madness — "thoughts" and "remembrance" fitted.

OPHELIA. [*To the* KING.] There's fennel[2] for you; and columbines.[3] [*To the* QUEEN.] There's rue[4] for you; and here's some for me; we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. — O! you must wear your rue with a difference.[5] There's a daisy.[6] I would give you some violets,[7] but they withered all when my father died. They say he made a good end. [*Sings.*]

For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.

LAERTES. Thought[8] and affliction, passion, hell itself,
She turns to favour and to prettiness.

OPHELIA. [*Sings.*]

And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead!
Go to thy death-bed,
He never will come again!

His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll;
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan:
God ha' mercy on his soul!

And of all Christian souls, I pray God. God be wi' ye!

[*Exit.*

[1] *document*: lesson.
[2] *fennel*: the emblem of flattery.
[3] *columbines*: the emblem of ingratitude.
[4] *rue*: the emblem of repentance and sorrow.
[5] *with a difference*: a term in heraldry, a slight distinction in coats of arms borne by different branches of the same family.
[6] *daisy*: the emblem of faithlessness.
[7] *violets*: the emblem of faithfulness.
[8] *Thought*: distress of mind.

LAERTES. Do you see this, O God?

KING. Laertes, I must commune with[1] your grief,
Or you deny me right. Go but apart,
Make choice of whom your wisest friends you will,
And they shall hear and judge 'twixt you and me.
If by direct or by collateral hand
They find us touch'd, we will our kingdom give,
Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours,
To you in satisfaction; but if not,
Be you content to lend your patience to us,
And we shall jointly labour with your soul
To give it due content.[2]

LAERTES. Let this be so.
His means of death, his obscure burial,
No trophy, sword, nor hatchment[3] o'er his bones,
No noble rite nor formal ostentation,
Cry to be heard, as 'twere from heaven to earth,
That I must call 't in question.

KING. So you shall;
And where the offence is let the great axe fall!
I pray you go with me. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *Later the same day. A room in the castle.*
Enter HORATIO *and a Servant.*

HORATIO. What are they that would speak with me?

SERVANT. Sailors, sir. They say they have letters for you.

[1] *commune with*: have a share in.
[2] *content*: satisfaction (through due revenge on the guilty one).
[3] *hatchment*: a tablet exhibiting the armorial bearings of a deceased person, which was affixed in front of his dwelling.

HORATIO. Let them come in. [*Exit Servant.*
I do not know from what part of the world
I should be greeted, if not from Lord Hamlet.

Enter Sailors.

FIRST SAILOR. God bless you, sir.

HORATIO. Let him bless thee too.

FIRST SAILOR. He shall, sir, an't please him. There's a letter for you, sir; it comes from the ambassador that was bound for England — if your name be Horatio, as I am let to know it is.

HORATIO. [*Opens the letter, and reads.*]

HORATIO,

When thou shalt have overlooked this, give these fellows some means to the king; they have letters for him. Ere we were two days old at sea, a pirate of very warlike appointment gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour, and in the grapple I boarded them; on the instant they got clear of our ship, so I alone became their prisoner. They have dealt with me like thieves of mercy; [1] *but they knew what they did — I am to do a good turn for them. Let the king have the letters I have sent; and repair thou to me with as much haste as thou wouldst fly death. I have words to speak in thine ear will make thee dumb; yet are they much too light for the bore* [2] *of the matter. These good fellows will bring thee where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England: of them I have much to tell thee. Farewell.*

He that thou knowest thine,

HAMLET.

Come; I will give you way for these your letters,

[1] *thieves of mercy*: highwaymen who treat their victim with kindness.

[2] *light for the bore*: the figure is that of a cannon too light for the large size of its calibre.

And do't the speedier that you may direct me
To him from whom you brought them. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. *Later the same day. A room in the castle. Enter* KING *and* LAERTES.

KING. Now must your conscience my acquittance seal,
And you must put me in your heart for friend,
Sith you have heard, and with a knowing ear,
That he which hath your noble father slain
Pursu'd my life.
LAERTES. It well appears. But tell me
Why you proceeded not against these feats
So crimeful and so capital in nature,
As by your safety, wisdom, all things else,
You mainly were stirr'd up.
KING. O, for two special reasons;
Which may to you, perhaps, seem much unsinew'd,
And yet to me they are strong. The queen his mother
Lives almost by his looks; and for myself —
My virtue or my plague, be it either which —
She's so conjunctive[1] to my life and soul,
That, as the star moves not but in his sphere,
I could not but by her. The other motive
Why to a public count[2] I might not go
Is the great love the general gender[3] bear him;
Who, dipping all his faults in their affection,

[1] *conjunctive*: united; with a glance at the astronomical meaning as applied to heavenly bodies, hence the references to "star" and "sphere" in the next line.

[2] *count*: reckoning.

[3] *general gender*: the common people. Compare III, VII, 4: "He's lov'd of the distracted multitude."

Would, like the spring that turneth wood to stone,[1]
Convert his gyves[2] to graces; so that my arrows,
Too slightly timber'd for so loud[3] a wind,
Would have reverted to my bow again,
And not where I had aim'd them.

LAERTES. And so have I a noble father lost,
A sister driven into desperate terms,
Whose worth — if praises may go back again[4] —
Stood challenger-on-mount of all the age
For her perfections. But my revenge will come.

KING. Break not your sleeps for that! You must not think
That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
That we can let our beard be shook with danger
And think it pastime. You shortly shall hear more.
I lov'd your father; and we love ourself,
And that, I hope, will teach you to imagine —

Enter a Messenger.

How now! what news?

MESSENGER. Letters, my lord, from Hamlet:
This to your majesty; this to the queen.

KING. From Hamlet! Who brought them?

MESSENGER. Sailors, my lord, they say; I saw them not:
They were given me by Claudio; he receiv'd them
Of him that brought them.

KING. Laertes, you shall hear them. —
Leave us. [*Exit Messenger.*

[1] *spring . . . stone*: There were in England several springs whose waters petrified wood; one such spring was in Shakespeare's native county Warwickshire.

[2] *gyves*: shackles.

[3] *loud*: violent, with a suggestion of the noisy clamor of a mob.

[4] *if praises . . . again*: if I may return to the subject of her praises.

HIGH AND MIGHTY:

You shall know I am set naked on your kingdom. To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your kingly eyes; when I shall, first asking your pardon thereunto, recount the occasions of my sudden and more strange return.

HAMLET.

What should this mean? Are all the rest come back?
Or is it some abuse, and no such thing?

LAERTES. Know you the hand?

KING. 'Tis Hamlet's character.[1] — "Naked!"
And in a postscript here, he says, "alone."
Can you advise me?

LAERTES. I'm lost in it, my lord. But, let him come!
It warms the very sickness in my heart
That I shall live and tell him to his teeth,
"Thus diddest thou!"

KING. If it be so,[2] Laertes —
As how should it be so? — [*Glances at the letter.*] How otherwise? —
Will you be rul'd by me?

LAERTES. Ay, my lord,
So you will not o'errule me to a peace.

KING. To thine own peace. If he be now return'd,
As checking[3] at his voyage, and that he means
No more to undertake it, I will work him
To an exploit, now ripe in my device,
Under the which he shall not choose but fall;
And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe,
But even his mother shall uncharge the practice[4]

[1] *character*: handwriting.
[2] *if it be so*: i.e. that Hamlet returns.
[3] *checking*: a hawking term, to recoil from, shy at.
[4] *uncharge the practice*: free the stratagem from all blame.

And call it accident.

LAERTES. My lord, I will be rul'd;
The rather,[1] if you could devise it so
That I might be the organ.

KING. It falls right.
You have been talk'd of since your travel much,
And that in Hamlet's hearing, for a quality
Wherein, they say, you shine. Your sum of parts
Did not, together, pluck such envy from him
As did that one, and that, in my regard,
Of the unworthiest siege.[2]

LAERTES. What part is that, my lord?

KING. A very riband in the cap of youth,
Yet needful, too; for youth no less becomes
The light and careless livery[3] that it wears
Than settled age his sables and his weeds[4]
Importing health and graveness. Two months since
Here was a gentleman of Normandy.
I've seen myself, and serv'd against, the French,
And they can well on horseback; but this gallant
Had witchcraft in't! He grew unto his seat,
And to such wondrous doing brought his horse,
As he had been incorps'd and demi-natur'd
With the brave beast. So far he topp'd my thought,
That I, in forgery of shapes and tricks,
Come short of what he did.

LAERTES. A Norman was't?

KING. A Norman.

LAERTES. Upon my life, Lamord!

[1] *rather*: more readily.
[2] *siege*: rank, importance.
[3] *livery*: clothes distinctive of a group.
[4] *his sables and his weeds*: its warm furs and dignified clothes.

KING. The very same.
LAERTES. I know him well. He is the brooch[1] indeed
And gem of all the nation.
KING. He made confession of you;[2]
And gave you such a masterly report
For art and exercise in your defence —
And for your rapier most especially —
That he cried out, 'twould be a sight indeed
If one could match you. The scrimers[3] of their nation,
He swore, had neither motion,[4] guard, nor eye,
If you oppos'd them. Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy
That he could nothing do but wish and beg
Your sudden coming o'er to play with him.
Now, out of this ——
LAERTES. What out of this, my lord?
KING. Laertes, was your father dear to you?
Or are you, like the painting of a sorrow,
A face without a heart?
LAERTES. Why ask you this?
KING. Not that I think you did not love your father,
But that I know love is begun by time,[5]
And that I see, in passages of proof,[6]
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it.
There lives within the very flame of love
A kind of wick or snuff that will abate it;

[1] *brooch*: ornament.
[2] *confession of you*: acknowledged your excellence.
[3] *scrimers*: fencers.
[4] *motion*: a fencing term, the regulated movement of the body.
[5] *begun by time*: has a beginning, and hence is subject to time.
[6] *passages of proof*: well-established instances.

And nothing is at a like goodness still,[1]
For goodness, growing to a plurisy,[2]
Dies in his own too-much. That we would do,
We should do when we would, for this "would" changes,
And hath abatements and delays as many
As there are tongues, are hands, are accidents;
And then this "should" is like a spendthrift sigh,[3]
That hurts by easing. But, to the quick o' the ulcer:
Hamlet comes back —— What would you undertake
To show yourself your father's son in deed
More than in words?

LAERTES. To cut his throat i' the church!

KING. No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize;[4]
Revenge should have no bounds. But, good Laertes,
Will you do this? keep close within your chamber;
Hamlet return'd shall know you are come home;
We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you; bring you, in fine, together,
And wager on your heads. He, being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils; so that with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated,[5] and, in a pass of practice,[6]
Requite him for your father.

[1] *still*: always.

[2] *plurisy*: excess.

[3] *spendthrift sigh*: it was believed that the sigh eased grief by drawing blood from the heart to the hurt of the body at large.

[4] *sanctuarize*: give the protection of sanctuary to.

[5] *unbated*: not blunted, as foils were, with a button on the end; that is, Laertes was to use a real sword instead of a foil.

[6] *pass of practice*: a thrust executed by a stratagem.

LAERTES. I will do't!
And for that purpose I'll anoint my sword.
I bought an unction of a mountebank,
So mortal that, but dip a knife in it,
Where it draws blood no cataplasm so rare,
Collected from all simples that have virtue
Under the moon, can save the thing from death
That is but scratch'd withal. I'll touch my point
With this contagion, that, if I gall him slightly,
It may be death.
KING. Let's further think of this;
Weigh what convenience both of time and means
May fit us to our shape.[1] If this should fail,
And that our drift look through our bad performance,
'Twere better not assay'd; therefore this project
Should have a back, or second, that might hold
If this should blast in proof.[2] Soft! — Let me see. —
We'll make a solemn wager on your cunnings —
I ha't!
When in your motion you are hot and dry —
As make your bouts more violent to that end —
And that he calls for drink, I'll have prepar'd him
A chalice for the nonce, whereon but sipping,
If he by chance escape your venom'd stuck,[3]
Our purpose may hold there. —

Enter QUEEN.

How now, sweet queen!
QUEEN. One woe doth tread upon another's heel,
So fast they follow. — Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.
LAERTES. Drown'd! O, where?

[1] *shape*: plan, design. [2] *blast in proof*: fail in actual trial.
[3] *stuck*: a fencing term, thrust.

QUEEN. There is a willow[1] grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;
There with fantastic garlands did she come,
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,
That liberal[2] shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do "dead men's fingers" call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver[3] broke,
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,[4]
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up;
Which time she chanted snatches of old tunes,
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indu'd
Unto that element. But long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her melodious lay
To muddy death.

LAERTES. Alas! Then, she is drown'd?

QUEEN. Drown'd, drown'd.

LAERTES. Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
And therefore I forbid my tears. — But yet
It is our trick;[5] nature her custom holds,
Let shame say what it will. — When these[6] are gone
The woman will be out. — Adieu, my lord!
I have a speech of fire that fain would blaze,
But that this folly douts it.[7] [*Exit.*

[1] *willow*: the willow was the common symbol of forsaken love.
[2] *liberal*: given to licentious speech.
[3] *sliver*: branch.
[4] *wide*: in the Elizabethan age, women wore large farthingales (i.e. hoop-skirts).
[5] *trick*: way. [6] *these*: these tears. [7] *douts it*: extinguishes it.

KING. Let's follow, Gertrude.
How much I had to do to calm his rage!
Now fear I this will give it start again;
Therefore let's follow. [*Exeunt.*

ACT V

SCENE I. *A day later. A churchyard.*

Enter two Clowns, with spades and mattock.

FIRST CLOWN. Is she to be buried in Christian burial[1] that wilfully seeks her own salvation?

SECOND CLOWN. I tell thee she is; and therefore make her grave straight:[2] the crowner[3] hath sat on her, and finds it Christian burial.

FIRST CLOWN. How can that be, unless she drowned herself in her own defence?

SECOND CLOWN. Why, 'tis found so.

FIRST CLOWN. It must be *se offendendo*;[4] it cannot be else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself wittingly, it argues an act; and an act hath three branches; it is — to act, to do, and to perform: argal,[5] she drowned herself wittingly.

SECOND CLOWN. Nay, but hear you, goodman delver, —

FIRST CLOWN. Give me leave. — Here lies the water; good: here stands the man; good: if the man go to this water, and drown himself, it is, will-he-nill-he, he goes — mark you that! but if the water come to him, and drown him, he drowns not himself:

[1] *Christian burial*: burial within the churchyard was denied to suicides.

[2] *straight*: straightway; or possibly a Biblical allusion to the straight gate and narrow way through which alone one comes to salvation.

[3] *crowner*: coroner.

[4] *se offendendo*: the clown means to say *se defendendo*, in self defence.

[5] *argal*: the clown's perversion of the Latin *ergo*, therefore.

argal, he that is not guilty of his own death shortens not his own life.

SECOND CLOWN. But is this law?

FIRST CLOWN. Ay, marry, is't; crowner's quest[1] law.

SECOND CLOWN. Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial.

FIRST CLOWN. Why, there thou sayest! And the more pity that great folk should have countenance[2] in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even[3] Christian. — Come; my spade. [*Hands him a spade.*] There is no ancient gentlemen but gardeners, ditchers, and grave-makers; they hold up Adam's profession.

SECOND CLOWN. Was he a gentleman?

FIRST CLOWN. A' was the first that ever bore arms.

SECOND CLOWN. Why, he had none.

FIRST CLOWN. What! art a heathen? How dost thou understand the Scripture? The Scripture says, "Adam digged." Could he dig without arms? I'll put another question to thee; if thou answerest me not to the purpose, confess thyself —

SECOND CLOWN. Go to!

FIRST CLOWN. What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter?

SECOND CLOWN. The gallows-maker; for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

FIRST CLOWN. I like thy wit well, in good faith. The gallows does well. But how does it well? it does well to those that do ill; now thou dost ill to say the gal-

[1] *quest*: inquest.
[2] *countenance*: permission.
[3] *even*: fellow, equal.

lows is built stronger than the church: argal, the gallows may do well to thee. To't again; come!

SECOND CLOWN. "Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?"

FIRST CLOWN. Ay, tell me that, and unyoke.[1]

SECOND CLOWN. Marry, now I can tell!

FIRST CLOWN. To't!

SECOND CLOWN. Mass, I cannot tell.

Enter at a distance HAMLET *and* HORATIO, *coming from the pirates' hiding-place.*

FIRST CLOWN. Cudgel thy brains no more about it, for your dull ass will not mend his pace with beating; and when you are asked this question next, say "a grave-maker"; the houses that he makes last till doomsday. — Go, get thee to Yaughan;[2] fetch me a stoup of liquor. [*Exit Second Clown.*

FIRST CLOWN. [*Digs and sings.*]

In youth, when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet,
To contract (uh![3]) *the time for* (uh!) *my behove,*
O! methought there (uh!) *was nothing meet.*

HAMLET. Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?

HORATIO. Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness.[4]

HAMLET. 'Tis e'en so; the hand of little employment hath the daintier sense.

FIRST CLOWN. [*Sings.*]

[1] *unyoke*: your task is over.

[2] *Yaughan*: a common Welsh name; possibly the keeper of an ale-house near the Globe.

[3] *uh*: the grunts of the clown as he digs.

[4] *property of easiness*: a quality that comes easily.

But age, with his stealing steps,
Hath claw'd me in his clutch,
And hath shipped me intil the land,
As if I had never been such.

[*Throws up a skull.*

HAMLET. That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls[1] it to the ground, as if it were Cain's jaw-bone,[2] that did the first murder! This might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'er-offices, one that would circumvent[3] God, might it not?

HORATIO. It might, my lord.

HAMLET. Or of a courtier, which could say, "Good morrow, sweet lord! how dost thou, good lord?" This might be my Lord Such-a-one, that praised my Lord Such-a-one's horse, when he meant to beg it, might it not?

HORATIO. Ay, my lord.

HAMLET. Why, e'en so; and now my Lady Worm's! chapless, and knocked about the mazzard[4] with a sexton's spade! Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't. Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggats[5] with 'em? Mine ache to think on't.

FIRST CLOWN. [*Sings.*]

A pick-axe, and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding sheet;

[1] *jowls*: dashes.
[2] *Cain's jaw-bone*: the jaw-bone of an ass with which Cain killed Abel.
[3] *circumvent*: get the better of by outwitting.
[4] *mazzard*: head.
[5] *loggats*: a game in which loggats (pear-shaped, and hence suggesting a skull) were hurled at a stake fixed in the ground.

O! a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

[*Throws up another skull.*

HAMLET. There's another. Why might not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddities[1] now? his quillets,[2] his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?[3] Why does he suffer this rude knave now to knock him about the sconce with a dirty shovel, and will not tell him of his action of battery? Hum! This fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his double vouchers, his recoveries. Is this the fine[4] of his fines, and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures? The very conveyances of his lands will hardly lie in this box;[5] and must the inheritor himself have no more, ha?

HORATIO. Not a jot more, my lord.

HAMLET. Is not parchment made of sheep-skins?

HORATIO. Ay, my lord, and of calf-skins too.

HAMLET. They are sheep and calves which seek out assurance[6] in that. — I will speak to this fellow. [*Advancing.*] Whose grave's this, sir?

FIRST CLOWN. Mine, sir. [*Sings.*]

[1] *quiddities*: captious niceties in argument.
[2] *quillets*: subtle verbal distinctions.
[3] *tricks*: adroit expedients; cf. John Day's popular comedy *Law Tricks*.
[4] *fine*: a law term, with a pun, "the end."
[5] *box*: the wooden box, or coffin, prepared to receive Ophelia?
[6] *assurance*: in law, the conveyance of lands by deed; with a pun on "security."

O! a pit of clay for to be made
For such a guest is meet.

HAMLET. I think it be thine, indeed; for thou liest[1] in't.

FIRST CLOWN. You lie out on't, sir, and therefore it is not yours. For my part, I do not lie in't, and yet it is mine.

HAMLET. Thou dost lie in't, to be in't and say it is thine: 'tis for the dead, not for the quick;[2] therefore thou liest.

FIRST CLOWN. 'Tis a "quick" lie, sir! 'twill away again, from me to you.

HAMLET. What man dost thou dig it for?

FIRST CLOWN. For no man, sir.

HAMLET. What woman, then?

FIRST CLOWN. For none, neither.

HAMLET. Who is to be buried in't?

FIRST CLOWN. One that was a woman, sir; but, rest her soul, she's dead.

HAMLET. How absolute[3] the knave is! We must speak by the card,[4] or equivocation will undo us. By the Lord, Horatio, these three years I have taken note of it; the age is grown so picked[5] that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe.[6] — How long hast thou been a grave-maker?

FIRST CLOWN. Of all the days i' the year, I came to't that day that our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

[1] *liest*: art. Several puns are made on the verb "lie" in its various senses, "to be," "to reside," "to tell a falsehood."
[2] *quick*: living. [3] *absolute*: positive.
[4] *by the card*: exactly to the point, as by a compass.
[5] *picked*: particular, fastidious. [6] *kibe*: chilblain.

HAMLET. How long is that since?

FIRST CLOWN. Cannot you tell that? Every fool can tell that! It was the very day that young Hamlet was born — he that is mad, and sent into England.

HAMLET. Ay, marry; why was he sent into England?

FIRST CLOWN. Why, because a' was mad. A' shall recover his wits there; or, if a' do not, 'tis no great matter there.

HAMLET. Why?

FIRST CLOWN. 'Twill not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he.

HAMLET. How came he mad?

FIRST CLOWN. Very strangely, they say.

HAMLET. How strangely?

FIRST CLOWN. Faith, e'en with losing his wits.

HAMLET. Upon what ground?

FIRST CLOWN. Why, here in Denmark. I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.[1]

HAMLET. How long will a man lie i' the earth ere he rot?

FIRST CLOWN. Faith, if a' be not rotten before a' die — as we have many pocky corses now-a-days that will scarce hold the laying in — a' will last you some eight year, or nine year; a tanner will last you nine year.

HAMLET. Why he more than another?

FIRST CLOWN. Why, sir, his hide is so tanned with his trade that a' will keep out water a great while; and your water is a sore decayer of your whoreson dead

[1] *thirty years*: this fixes the age of Hamlet; cf. also the lines that follow about Yorick, and the references in the Mouse Trap to "full thirty years."

body. Here's a skull now; this skull hath lain you i' the earth three-and-twenty years.

HAMLET. Whose was it?

FIRST CLOWN. A whoreson mad fellow's it was! Whose do you think it was?

HAMLET. Nay, I know not.

FIRST CLOWN. A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! a' poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the king's jester.

HAMLET. This!

FIRST CLOWN. E'en that.

HAMLET. Let me see. — [*Takes the skull.*] — Alas! poor Yorick! — I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it! Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning?[1] quite chapfallen? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour[2] she must come. Make her laugh at that! — Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

HORATIO. What's that, my lord?

HAMLET. Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?

HORATIO. E'en so.

HAMLET. And smelt so? pah! [*Throws down the skull.*

HORATIO. E'en so, my lord.

[1] *grinning*: in the Folio this is changed to "leering."
[2] *favour*: appearance.

HAMLET. To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander, till he find it stopping a bung-hole?

HORATIO. 'Twere to consider too curiously[1] to consider so.

HAMLET. No, faith, not a jot! But to follow him thither, with modesty[2] enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died; Alexander was buried; Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam; and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

"Imperious Cæsar, dead and turn'd to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away:
O, that that earth, which kept the world in awe,
Should patch a wall to expel the winter's flaw!"[3]

But soft! but soft! Aside. Here comes the king.

Enter Priests, &c., in procession; bell tolling; the corpse of OPHELIA *borne in,* LAERTES, KING, QUEEN, *Lords, &c., following.*

The queen, the courtiers? Who is that they follow?
And with such maimed rites? This doth betoken
The corse they follow did with desperate hand
Fordo its own life. 'Twas of some estate.
Couch we awhile and mark. [*Retiring with* HORATIO.

LAERTES. What ceremony else?

HAMLET. That is Laertes —
A very noble youth! Mark.

LAERTES. What ceremony else?

FIRST PRIEST. Her obsequies have been as far enlarg'd
As we have warrantise. Her death was doubtful,

[1] *curiously*: minutely.
[2] *modesty*: freedom from exaggeration.
[3] *flaw*: gust.

And, but that great command o'ersways the order,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
Till the last trumpet; for charitable prayers,
Shards,[1] flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her.
Yet here she is allow'd her virgin crants,[2]
Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home[3]
Of bell and burial.

LAERTES. Must there no more be done?

FIRST PRIEST. No more be done.
We should profane the service of the dead
To sing a requiem and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls.

LAERTES. Lay her i' the earth;
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring! — I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be,
When thou liest howling.[4]

HAMLET. What! the fair Ophelia?

QUEEN. [*Scattering flowers.*] Sweets to the sweet. Farewell!
I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not t'have strewed thy grave.

LAERTES. O! treble woe
Fall ten times treble on that cursed head
Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious[5] sense
Depriv'd thee of! — Hold off the earth awhile,

[1] *Shards*: fragments of pottery.
[2] *crants*: garlands, usually made of white paper, carried at the funerals of young girls or virgins.
[3] *bringing home*: the image is that of bringing a bride from the church to her future home.
[4] *howling*: i.e. in hell torments.
[5] *ingenious*: high-minded.

Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.
[*Leaps into the grave.*
Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
Till of this flat a mountain you have made
To o'ertop old Pelion or the skyish head
Of blue Olympus!

HAMLET. [*Advancing.*] What is he, whose grief
Bears such an emphasis? whose phrase of sorrow
Conjures the wandering stars,[1] and makes them stand
Like wonder-wounded hearers? This is I,
Hamlet, the Dane! [*Leaps into the grave.*

LAERTES. [*Seizing him by the throat.*] The devil take thy soul!

HAMLET. Thou pray'st not well.
I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat!
For though I am not splenetive and rash,
Yet have I in me something dangerous,
Which let thy wiseness fear. Away thy hand!
[*They struggle in the grave.*

KING. Pluck them asunder.

QUEEN. Hamlet! Hamlet!

ALL. Gentlemen!
[*The Attendants part them, and they come out of the grave.*

HORATIO. Good my lord, be quiet.

HAMLET. Why, I will fight with him upon this theme
Until my eyelids will no longer wag.

QUEEN. O, my son, what theme?

HAMLET. I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not, with all their quantity of love,
Make up my sum! — What wilt thou do for her?

KING. O, he is mad, Laertes.

[1] *wandering stars*: the sun, moon, and planets.

QUEEN. For love of God, forbear him.
HAMLET. 'Swounds, show me what thou'lt do!
Woo't weep? woo't fight? woo't fast? woo't tear thyself?
Woo't drink up Esill?[1] eat a crocodile?
I'll do't! Dost thou come here to whine?
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her, and so will I!
And, if thou prate of mountains, let them throw
Millions of acres on us, till our ground,
Singeing his pate against the burning zone,
Make Ossa like a wart! Nay, an thou'lt mouth,[2]
I'll rant as well as thou!
QUEEN. This is mere madness:
And thus a while the fit will work on him;
Anon, as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets[3] are disclos'd,
His silence will sit drooping.
HAMLET. Hear you, sir:
What is the reason that you use me thus?
I lov'd you ever. — But it is no matter;
Let Hercules himself do what he may,
The cat will mew and dog will have his day. [*Exit.*
KING. I pray you, good Horatio, wait upon him.
[*Exit* HORATIO.

[1] *Esill*: a satisfactory interpretation of this word has not been discovered. Some scholars think that Hamlet refers to a river, others that he alludes to the drinking of eisel, or vinegar. The Second Quarto prints the word with a capital; the Folio, with a capital and in italics as a proper noun.

[2] *mouth*: rant.

[3] *golden couplets*: the pigeon lays two eggs, and the young when "disclosed" (hatched out of the shell) are covered with a yellow down.

[*Aside to* LAERTES.] Strengthen your patience in our
last night's speech;
We'll put the matter to the present push.[1] —
Good Gertrude, set some watch over your son.
This grave shall have a living[2] monument.
[*Aside to* LAERTES.] An hour of quiet shortly shall we
see;
Till then, in patience our proceeding be. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *Later the same day. A hall in the castle.*
Enter HAMLET *and* HORATIO.

HAMLET. So much for this, sir: now shall you see the
other.
You do remember all the circumstance?
HORATIO. Remember it, my lord!
HAMLET. Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
That would not let me sleep; methought I lay
Worse than the mutines in the bilboes.[3] Rashly —
And prais'd be rashness for it; let us know,
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall, and that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will, —
HORATIO. That is most certain.
HAMLET. Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown[4] scarf'd about me, in the dark
Grop'd I to find out them; had my desire;
Finger'd their packet; and, in fine, withdrew

[1] *present push*: instant execution. [2] *living*: enduring.
[3] *bilboes*: the bilbo was a long iron bar, fixed to the floor, and equipped with shackles into which the ankles of mutinous sailors were fitted.
[4] *sea-gown*: a long gown regularly worn by sailors.

To mine own room again, making so bold —
My fears forgetting manners — to unseal
Their grand commission. Where I found, Horatio, —
O royal knavery! — an exact[1] command,
Larded with many several sorts of reasons
Importing Denmark's health, and England's too,
With, ho! such bugs and goblins in my life,[2]
That, on the supervise, no leisure bated,[3]
No, not to stay the grinding of the axe,
My head should be struck off!

HORATIO. Is't possible!

HAMLET. Here's the commission: read it at more leisure.
[*Hands him the letter.*
But wilt thou hear me how I did proceed?

HORATIO. I beseech you.

HAMLET. Being thus be-netted round with villanies,
Ere I could make a prologue to my brains
They[4] had begun the play. I sat me down,
Devis'd a new commission, wrote it fair.
I once did hold it, as our statists do,
A baseness to write fair,[5] and labour'd much
How to forget that learning; but, sir, now
It did me yeoman's service. Wilt thou know
The effect of what I wrote?

HORATIO. Ay, good my lord.

HAMLET. An earnest conjuration from the king,
As England was his faithful tributary,

[1] *exact*: strict.
[2] *bugs . . . life*: desperate crimes that had characterized my life.
[3] *bated*: deducted. [4] *They*: i.e. "my brains."
[5] *write fair*: to write a clear and beautiful hand, such as official scribes were required to write, might place a gentleman under suspicion of professionalism.

As love between them like the palm should flourish,
As peace should still her wheaten garland wear,
And stand a comma[1] 'tween their amities,
And many such-like "As"es of great charge,
That, on the view and knowing of these contents,
Without debatement further more or less,
He should the bearers put to sudden death,
Not shriving-time[2] allow'd.

HORATIO. How was this seal'd?

HAMLET. Why, even in that was heaven ordinant.
I had my father's signet in my purse,
Which was the model[3] of that Danish seal;
Folded the writ up in form of the other,
Subscrib'd it, gave't the impression, plac'd it safely,
The changeling never known. Now, the next day
Was our sea-fight; and what to this was sequent
Thou know'st already.

HORATIO. So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to't.

HAMLET. Why, man, they did make love to this employment!
They are not near my conscience; their defeat
Does by their own insinuation[4] grow.
'Tis dangerous when the baser nature[5] comes
Between the pass[6] and fell-incensed points
Of mighty opposites.[7]

HORATIO. Why, what a king is this!

HAMLET. Does it not, thinks't thee, stand me now upon —

[1] *comma*: as opposed to a period, indicating continuity.
[2] *shriving-time*: time to receive absolution through confession.
[3] *model*: exact counterpart.
[4] *insinuation*: winding themselves into the affair.
[5] *baser nature*: inferior person.
[6] *pass*: thrust.
[7] *opposites*: opponents.

He that hath kill'd my king, and whor'd my mother,
Popp'd in between the election and my hopes,
Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
And with such cozenage[1] — is't not perfect conscience
To quit him with this arm? and is't not to be damn'd
To let this canker of our nature come
In further evil?

HORATIO. It must be shortly known to him from England
What is the issue of the business there.

HAMLET. It will be short; the interim is mine:
And a man's life's no more than to say "One!" —
But I am very sorry, good Horatio,
That to Laertes I forgot myself;
For, by the image of my cause, I see
The portraiture of his. I'll court his favours.
But, sure, the bravery[2] of his grief did put me
Into a towering passion! —

HORATIO. Peace! Who comes here?

Enter OSRIC, *a dandified gallant.*

OSRIC. Your lordship is right welcome back to Denmark.

HAMLET. I humbly thank you, sir. [*Aside to* HORATIO.] Dost know this water-fly?[3]

HORATIO. [*Aside to* HAMLET.] No, my good lord.

HAMLET. [*Aside to* HORATIO.] Thy state is the more gracious; for 'tis a vice to know him. He hath much land, and fertile: let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess.[4] 'Tis a chough[5] — but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt.

[1] *cozenage*: fraud, treachery.
[2] *bravery*: ostentation, showy character.
[3] *water-fly*: dandy.
[4] *let . . . mess*: let an "ass" be rich in possessions, and he will be admitted into the highest circles of society.
[5] *chough*: a foolish bird, hence "a fool."

OSRIC. Sweet lord, if your lordship were at leisure, I should impart a thing to you from his majesty.

HAMLET. I will receive it, sir, with all diligence of spirit. Put your bonnet to his right use; 'tis for the head.[1]

OSRIC. I thank your lordship, 'tis very hot.

HAMLET. No, believe me, 'tis very cold; the wind is northerly.

OSRIC. It is indifferent cold — my lord — indeed —

HAMLET. But yet methinks it is very sultry and hot for my complexion.

OSRIC. Exceedingly, my lord! it is very sultry — as 'twere — I cannot tell how. But, my lord, his majesty bade me signify[2] to you that he has laid a great wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter —

HAMLET. I beseech you, remember.

[HAMLET *moves him to put on his hat.*

OSRIC. Nay, good my lord. [HAMLET *again moves him to put on his hat.*] For mine ease, in good faith. [HAMLET *insists, until* OSRIC *yields and puts on his hat.*] Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes. Believe me, an absolute gentleman! full of most excellent differences! of very soft society, and great showing! Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the card or calendar[3] of gentry; for you shall find in him the continent[4] of what part a gentleman would see.

[1] *bonnet . . . head*: courtesy required a man to remove his hat in the presence of a superior, and equally required the person so honored to give permission for the hat to be replaced. Osric's reply is essentially discourteous in that it implies that he had removed his hat not as a compliment but because of the hot weather. Hamlet thereupon punishes him, as he deserved.

[2] *signify*: Osric employs a dandified vocabulary, or as Jonson would call it, a "perfumed diction."

[3] *card or calendar*: mariner's compass, or guide (index).

[4] *continent*: that which comprises or sums up.

HAMLET. Sir, his definement[1] suffers no perdition in you, though I know to divide him inventorially would dizzy the arithmetic of memory and yet but yaw neither in respect of his quick sail, but, in the verity of extolment, I take him to be a soul of great article, and his infusion of such dearth and rareness, as, to make true diction of him, his semblable is his mirror, and who else would trace him, his umbrage, nothing more.

OSRIC. Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

HAMLET. The concernancy, sir? Why do we wrap the gentleman in our more rawer breath?

OSRIC. Sir?

HORATIO. Is't not possible to understand in another tongue? You will too't, sir, really?[2]

HAMLET. What imports the nomination of this gentleman?

OSRIC. Of Laertes?

HORATIO. [*Aside to* HAMLET.] His purse is empty already; all's golden words are spent.

HAMLET. Of him, sir.

OSRIC. I know you are not ignorant —

HAMLET. I would you did, sir; yet, in faith, if you did, it would not much approve[3] me. Well, sir?

OSRIC. You are not ignorant of what excellence Laertes is —

HAMLET. I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; but, to know a man well, were to know himself.

[1] *definement*: since Hamlet is merely trying to outdo Osric in the strange use of words, we may leave his sentence, as he intended it, obscure.

[2] *really*: apparently Horatio is also trying to confuse Osric.

[3] *approve*: commend.

OSRIC. I mean, sir, for his weapon. But in the imputation laid on him by them, in his meed[1] he's unfellowed.

HAMLET. What's his weapon?

OSRIC. Rapier and dagger.

HAMLET. That's two[2] of his weapons. — But? Well?

OSRIC. The king, sir, hath wagered with him six Barbary horses; against the which he has imponed,[3] as I take it, six French rapiers and poniards, with their assigns,[4] as girdle, hangers, and so. Three of the carriages, in faith, are very dear to fancy, very responsive[5] to the hilts, most delicate carriages, and of very liberal conceit.[6]

HAMLET. What call you the "carriages"?

HORATIO. [*Aside to* HAMLET.] I knew you must be edified by the margent,[7] ere you had done.

OSRIC. The "carriages," sir, are the hangers.[8]

HAMLET. The phrase would be more german to the matter if we could carry cannon by our sides; I would it might be "hangers" till then. But, on: six Barbary horses against six French swords, their assigns, and three liberal-conceited carriages; that's the French bet against the Danish. Why is this "imponed," as you call it?

OSRIC. The king, sir, hath laid that in a dozen passes

[1] *meed*: excellence.

[2] *two*: Osric had mentioned only one weapon, and the contest seems to have been fought with "single rapiers," not with "rapier and dagger."

[3] *imponed*: staked.

[4] *assigns*: a legal term, appurtenances.

[5] *responsive*: becoming.

[6] *liberal conceit*: elaborate design.

[7] *margent*: explanatory notes were formerly printed in the margin.

[8] *hangers*: the straps by which the rapier was suspended, often richly decorated.

between yourself and him, he shall not exceed you three hits; he hath laid on twelve for nine.[1] And it would come to immediate trial, if your lordship would vouchsafe the answer.[2]

HAMLET. How if I answer "No"?

OSRIC. I mean, my lord, the opposition of your person in trial.

HAMLET. Sir, I will walk here in the hall. If it please his majesty, 'tis the breathing time[3] of day with me. Let the foils be brought, the gentleman willing, and the king hold his purpose. I will win for him if I can; if not, I will gain nothing but my shame and the odd hits.

OSRIC. Shall I re-deliver you so?

HAMLET. To this effect, sir, after what flourish your nature will.

OSRIC. I commend my duty to your lordship.

HAMLET. Yours, yours. [*Exit* OSRIC.] — He does well to commend it himself; there are no tongues else for's turn.

HORATIO. This lapwing runs away with the shell on his head.[4]

HAMLET. He did comply[5] with his dug before he sucked it. Thus has he — and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on — only got the tune of the time and outward habit

[1] *twelve for nine*: Osric is not clear; possibly he means at the ratio of twelve to nine.

[2] *answer*: encounter; Hamlet wilfully misinterprets.

[3] *breathing time*: time for recreation.

[4] *lapwing . . . head*: it was the general notion that the newly hatched lapwing ran about with the shell still upon its head; hence, a young upstart.

[5] *comply*: observe forms of ceremonious politeness.

of encounter,[1] a kind of yesty collection[2] which carries them through and through the most fond and winnowed opinions;[3] and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.

Enter a LORD.

LORD. My lord, his majesty commended him to you by young Osric, who brings back to him that you attend him in the hall. He sends to know if your pleasure hold to play with Laertes, or that you will take longer time.

HAMLET. I am constant to my purposes; they follow the king's pleasure. If his fitness speaks, mine is ready, now, or whensoever, provided I be so able as now.

LORD. The king, and queen, and all are coming down.

HAMLET. In happy time.

LORD. The queen desires you to use some gentle entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play.

HAMLET. She well instructs me. [*Exit Lord.*

HORATIO. You will lose this wager, my lord.

HAMLET. I do not think so. Since he went into France, I have been in continual practice; I shall win at the odds. — But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart. But, it is no matter.

HORATIO. Nay, good my lord.

HAMLET. It is but foolery. — But, it is such a kind of gain-giving[4] as would perhaps trouble a woman.

[1] *encounter*: social usage.

[2] *yesty collection*: a collection of light social behaviors, which are, like bubbles, pretty but empty.

[3] *fond and winnowed opinions*: foolish and accepted arbiters of elegance.

[4] *gain-giving*: misgiving.

HORATIO. If your mind dislike any thing, obey it. I will forestal their repair hither, and say you are not fit.

HAMLET. Not a whit! We defy augury. There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man has aught of what he leaves,[1] what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

Enter KING, QUEEN, LAERTES, OSRIC, *Lords, &c.*; *Attendants with table, foils, flagons of wine.*

KING. Come, Hamlet; come, and take this hand from me.

[HAMLET *seizes the hand of* LAERTES.

HAMLET. Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong;
But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence[2] knows,
And you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd
With sore distraction. What I have done
That might your nature, honour, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
Who does it then? His madness. If't be so,
Hamlet is of the faction that is wrong'd;
His madness is poor Hamlet's enemy.

[1] *since . . . leaves*: since the things of this world are no part of a man's real self.

[2] *presence*: the Court.

Sir, in this audience,
Let my disclaiming from a purpos'd evil
Free me so far in your most generous thoughts,
That I have shot mine arrow o'er the house
And hurt my brother.

LAERTES. I am satisfied in nature,
Whose motive in this case should stir me most
To my revenge; but in my terms of honour
I stand aloof, and will no reconcilement
Till by some elder masters, of known honour,
I have a voice and precedent of peace,[1]
To keep my name ungor'd. But till that time
I do receive your offer'd love like love,
And will not wrong it.

HAMLET. I embrace it freely;
And will this brother's wager frankly play. —
Give us the foils. [*To* LAERTES.] Come on!

LAERTES. Come; one for me.

HAMLET. I'll be your foil, Laertes. In mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star i' the darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.

LAERTES. You mock me, sir.

HAMLET. No, by this hand.

KING. Give them the foils, young Osric.

[OSRIC *spreads the foils upon the table. The* KING *takes his seat by the* QUEEN *upon a dais.* LAERTES *advances to select a foil; whereupon the* KING *seeks to divert* HAMLET'S *attention.*

Cousin Hamlet! [HAMLET *turns.*
You know the wager?

[1] *voice and precedent of peace*: authority and precedent in the accepted rules of honor to make my peace with you.

HAMLET. Very well, my lord.
Your Grace hath laid the odds o' the weaker side.
KING. I do not fear it; I have seen you both:
But since he is better'd, we have therefore odds.
LAERTES. This is too heavy; let me see another.

[*Selects the unbaited rapier, and stands holding the point concealed.* HAMLET *picks up a foil.*

HAMLET. This likes me well. — These foils have all a length?
OSRIC. Ay, my good lord.
KING. Set me the stoups of wine upon that table.
If Hamlet give the first, or second, hit,
Or quit in answer of the third exchange,
Let all the battlements their ordnance fire;
The king shall drink to Hamlet's better breath.
And in the cup an union[1] shall he throw,
Richer than that which four successive kings
In Denmark's crown have worn. Give me the cups;
And let the kettle[2] to the trumpets speak,
The trumpets to the cannoneer without,
The cannons to the heavens, the heavens to earth,
"Now the king drinks to Hamlet!" — Come, begin.
And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

[*The Judges,* OSRIC *and* HORATIO, *take their stand.* HAMLET *and* LAERTES *assume the dueling posture.*

HAMLET. Come on, sir.
LAERTES. Come, my lord. [*They begin to play.*
HAMLET. One!
LAERTES. No.
HAMLET. Judgment.

[1] *union*: an unusually fine and perfectly spherical pearl.
[2] *kettle*: kettle-drum.

OSRIC. A hit, a very palpable hit.

LAERTES. Well; again.

[*They resume play. Upon the expiration of the time limit, the Judges bring the first bout to an end.*

KING. Stay; give me drink. — Hamlet, this pearl is thine.

[*Holds up what seems to be a pearl of great beauty; drops it into the cup, and crushes it with a pestle.*

Here's to thy health! [*Pretends to drink.*] Give him the cup.

[*The Attendant offers the cup to* HAMLET. *The kettle-drums roll, the trumpets sound, and the cannons roar within. When the noise dies away,* HAMLET *speaks.*

HAMLET. I'll play this bout first; set it by awhile. — Come!

[*The second bout is begun, and for some time played in tense silence.*

Another hit; what say you?

LAERTES. A touch, a touch, I do confess.

KING. Our son shall win.

QUEEN. He's fat,[1] and scant of breath.

[*At last the Judges end the second bout. The* QUEEN *descends to where* HAMLET *stands by the table.*

Here, Hamlet, take my napkin, rub thy brows.

[*While he is mopping his brow, she lifts the cup in a health to him.*

The queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet.

HAMLET. Good madam!

KING. [*Rushing down.*] Gertrude, do not drink!

QUEEN. I will, my lord! I pray you, pardon me. [*Drinks.*

[1] *fat*: not in good physical condition for violent exercise, "soft"; cf. I, v, 32–3: "the fat weed that roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf."

KING. [*Aside.*] It is the poison'd cup: it is too late!

[*She offers the cup to* HAMLET.

HAMLET. I dare not drink yet, madam; by and by.

QUEEN. Come, let me wipe thy face.

LAERTES. [*To the* KING.] My lord, I'll hit him now.

KING. [*To* LAERTES.] I do not think't.

LAERTES. [*Aside.*] And yet 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience.

HAMLET. Come, for the third! Laertes, you but dally;
I pray you, pass with your best violence.
I am afeard you make a wanton[1] of me.

LAERTES. Say you so? come on.

[*The third bout is begun. Neither player is able to score a touch.*

OSRIC. [*Ready to end the bout.*] Nothing, neither way.

LAERTES. Have at you — now!

[LAERTES, *abandoning all defense, rushes in upon* HAMLET *and wounds him.* HAMLET *seizes* LAERTES' *wrist,* LAERTES *seizes* HAMLET'S *wrist, and in the scuffle they exchange weapons.* HAMLET *wounds* LAERTES.

KING. Part them! they are incens'd.

[*The Judges step between them.*

HAMLET. Nay; come, again. [*The* QUEEN *falls.*

OSRIC. Look to the queen there, ho!

HORATIO. They bleed on both sides. [*To* HAMLET.] How is it, my lord?

OSRIC. How is it, Laertes?

LAERTES. Why, as a woodcock to mine own springe, Osric;
I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery.

[1] *wanton*: child.

HAMLET. How does the queen? [*Kneels by her.*
KING. She swounds to see them bleed.
QUEEN. No, no! the drink! the drink! — O my dear Hamlet! —
The drink! the drink! I am poison'd. [*Dies.*
HAMLET. O villany! Ho, let the door be lock'd! 316
[HORATIO *leaps to the door and locks it.*
Treachery! Seek it out! [LAERTES *falls.*
LAERTES. It is here, Hamlet. Hamlet, thou art slain.
No medicine in the world can do thee good;
In thee there is not half an hour of life. 320
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand,
Unbated and envenom'd. The foul practice[1]
Hath turn'd itself on me. Lo! here I lie,
Never to rise again. Thy mother's poison'd.
I can no more. The king, the king's to blame! 325
HAMLET. The point envenom'd too! —
Then, venom, to thy work! [*Stabs the* KING.
ALL. Treason! treason!
KING. O, yet defend me, friends! I am but hurt.
HAMLET. Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane! 330
Drink off this potion!
[*He forces the contents of the poisoned cup down the throat of the* KING.
Is thy "union" here?[2]
Follow my mother! [KING *dies.*
LAERTES. He is justly serv'd;
It is a poison temper'd by himself.
Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet.
[*Holds out his hand;* HAMLET *takes it.*

[1] *practice*: stratagem.
[2] "*union*" *here*: a pun on (1) a pearl (2) marriage.

Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,
Nor thine on me! [*Dies.*
HAMLET. Heaven make thee free of it! I follow thee.
[*Seats himself upon the steps of the dais.*
I am dead, Horatio. — Wretched queen, adieu! —
You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
That are but mutes or audience to this act,
Had I but time [*A paroxysm of pain interrupts him.*] — as this fell sergeant,[1] death,
Is strict in his arrest, — O, I could tell you ——
But let it be. — Horatio, I am dead;
Thou livest: report me and my cause aright
To the unsatisfied.
HORATIO. Never believe it!
I am more an antique Roman[2] than a Dane.
Here's yet some liquor left. [*Lifts the poisoned cup.*
HAMLET. [*Leaping to him.*] As thou'rt a man,
Give me the cup! — Let go! — By heaven, I'll have't!
[*He wrests the cup from* HORATIO's *hands, and dashes it to the floor; then sinks again to the dais.*
O God, Horatio, what a wounded name,
Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me!
If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story. [*March afar off, and shot within.*
What warlike noise is this?
OSRIC. Young Fortinbras, with conquest come from Poland,

[1] *sergeant*: an officer of the law who made arrests.
[2] *Roman*: Shakespeare regularly conceives of the Romans as deeming suicide a noble act.

To the ambassadors of England gives
This warlike volley.

HAMLET. O, I die, Horatio!
The potent poison quite o'er-crows[1] my spirit.
I cannot live to hear the news from England;
But I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice;
So tell him — with the occurrents, more and less,
Which have solicited[2] —— The rest is silence. [*Dies.*

HORATIO. Now cracks a noble heart! Good-night, sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest! —
[*March within.*
Why does the drum come hither?

Enter FORTINBRAS *with his army; the English Ambassadors, and others.*

FORTINBRAS. Where is this sight?

HORATIO. What is it ye would see?
If aught of woe or wonder, cease your search.

FORTINBRAS. This quarry[3] cries on havoc. O proud Death!
What feast is toward in thine eternal[4] cell
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

FIRST AMBASSADOR. The sight is dismal!
And our affairs from England come too late;
The ears are senseless that should give us hearing,
To tell him his commandment is fulfill'd,

[1] *o'er-crows*: the image is that of a victorious cock crowing over the body of its defeated antagonist.
[2] *solicited*: incited.
[3] *quarry*: heap of dead bodies. [4] *eternal*: abhorred.

That Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
Where should we have our thanks?

HORATIO. Not from his[1] mouth,
Had it the ability of life to thank you:
He never gave commandment for their death.
But since, so jump upon this bloody question,
You from the Polack wars, and you from England,
Are here arriv'd, give order that these bodies
High on a stage be placed to the view;
And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
How these things came about: so shall you hear
Of carnal,[2] bloody, and unnatural acts,
Of accidental judgments,[3] casual slaughters,[4]
Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,[5]
And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
Fall'n on the inventors' heads.[6] All this can I
Truly deliver.

FORTINBRAS. Let us haste to hear it;
And call the noblest to the audience.
For me, with sorrow I embrace my fortune;
I have some rights of memory[7] in this kingdom,
Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me.

HORATIO. Of that I shall have also cause to speak,
And from his mouth whose voice will draw on more.
But let this same be presently[8] perform'd

[1] *his*: i.e. Claudius'.
[2] *carnal*: murderous, as in *Richard III*, IV, iv, 56.
[3] *accidental judgments*: the deaths of Ophelia and Gertrude.
[4] *casual slaughters*: accidental killings, as of Polonius.
[5] *deaths . . . forced cause*: the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.
[6] *inventors' heads*: Claudius and Laertes.
[7] *rights of memory*: remembered rights.
[8] *presently*: at once.

Even while men's minds are wild, lest more mischance
On plots and errors happen.

FORTINBRAS. Let four captains
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov'd most royally: and for his passage,
The soldiers' music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him.
Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this
Becomes the field, but here shows much amiss. —
Go, bid the soldiers shoot.

[*A dead march. Exeunt, bearing off the bodies; after which, a peal of ordnance is shot off within.*

FINIS.

COMMENTARY

COMMENTARY

ACT I

MANY readers do not understand the problems that confront a dramatist at the outset of a theatrical performance, and hence fail to appreciate the ingenuity with which an artist like Shakespeare constructs his opening scenes. Yet, because of the practical conditions that attend stage-representation, the most adroit craftsmanship is required to begin a play — far more than is required to begin any other form of literary composition. The author has to present his introductory information, all-important for an understanding of his story, orally, to a noisy crowd of people whose minds, distracted by assembly, are flying toward every point of the compass; and, further, he has to condense this introductory material into the briefest space possible if he is to finish his play within the "two short hours" allowed him. In comparison, the task of the novelist is easy. In the first place, he addresses himself, not to a noisy crowd, but to a single quiet reader, who, having excluded the outside world, focuses his whole attention on the book in hand; and, in the second place, he has at his disposal all the time he needs for a full presentation of setting and antecedent events. To the playwright, however, these advantages are denied; he must work under adverse conditions of attention, and within cramping limits of time.

Obviously, in order that his all-important introductory information may receive the hearing it demands, the first effort of the dramatist must be to catch the attention of his audience. Yet to win attention at the beginning of a theatrical performance is exceedingly difficult. Recently the

manager of the largest organization of vaudeville entertainers in America wrote under the caption *On Being First*:

> To a vaudevillian the position he will have on the bill is of almost as much concern as the salary. Frequently it is more important. An order to open the show is the worst possible affront that can be offered an artistic temperament. It simply "couldn't be done." A high-priced and high-strung entertainer would even kick vigorously — maybe faint — at being told to go on third. There is more of common sense than temperament in this, however. If an act in which there was dialogue had to open a show it would be ruined. At that time people are walking into the theatre, and are not settled to listen to a line, or pay much attention to song. The *best* of dialogue would fall flat.

If the polite audiences of our modern theater offer, even to vaudeville entertainers, so much difficulty at the beginning of a performance, we may be sure that the motley crowds in the Elizabethan theater presented to the author of a serious drama a far greater problem. With the entrance-fee at only a penny, the baser elements of the city flocked into the big open-air playhouses. In the pit, where all persons stood up, jostled together colliers, prentices, lackeys, servants, and such-like — " penny stinkards " Jonson scornfully called them. In the top gallery swarmed an almost equally disreputable mob. Only in the first and second galleries, and in the Lords' Rooms, could the author hope to find an occasional "judicious spectator" ready to lend him a serious hearing. Furthermore, the entire crowd, in holiday mood, was drinking ale and wine, cracking nuts, smoking tobacco, eating apples, oranges, gingerbread cookies, and the like, all of which were vended to them by playhouse servants.

In order to catch the attention of this heterogeneous and noisy assemblage Shakespeare commonly resorts to some special artifice — as in *Macbeth*, where he begins with the Witches amid thunder and lightning, weird figures calculated to arouse interest in the idlest spectator. But, having

thus momentarily caught the crowd, he must promptly, by a second artifice, rivet attention to the stage and the sequence of events there occurring. In *Macbeth* he accomplishes this by again introducing the Witches, dancing in gruesome rites about a cauldron, and uttering a mysterious threefold prophecy — at once in part fulfilled.

His general method is well illustrated by the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. The play begins with two clownish servants (unimportant personages) indulging in witty and more or less indelicate jests. The first jest produces laughter among those few who hear it, and this makes those who failed to hear eager not to miss the second. Thus in a short time silence is established, and attention drawn to the stage. Then promptly the dramatist rivets that attention by starting a street-fight. With the entrance of armed gentlemen to aid the servants, the comic spirit of the scene quickly changes, and the fight assumes the nature of a deadly feud between the two leading families of Verona; the stage becomes more and more crowded, swords are drawn on all sides, and a bloody spectacle seems inevitable. By the time the situation reaches a grand climax with the entrance of old Montague and old Capulet, heads of the respective families, and of the Prince himself angrily issuing an ultimatum, the interest of the spectators has been permanently fixed on the stage, and upon the plot there unfolding before their eyes.

But to gain the attention of the crowd is a mere preparation for more serious tasks. The dramatist must at once proceed: (1) to strike the emotional keynote of his story in order to put the audience in the right mood for an appreciation of what is to follow; (2) to give adequate information concerning the precedent events; (3) to introduce the chief personages, and indicate their relations one to another; and (4) to build up the little world in which the action is to take place. Only after he has done all this can he safely set the wheels of his plot in motion.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare devotes to introduction the first three scenes. Let us, therefore, examine these scenes in order to observe how skillfully he accomplishes the various things demanded of him.

Act I, Scene i

The play opens with a lone sentinel, at midnight, lantern in hand and partisan on shoulder, stolidly pacing back and forth. There is always something fascinating about a sentinel; his very presence creates an atmosphere of mystery, and his threatening show of force excites curiosity. After a few moments of silence — during which the failure of the actor to speak draws questioning eyes to the stage — the clock in the castle-tower begins slowly to toll the hour of twelve. The strokes of the great bell — the "alarum bell" as the actors called it — compel attention, and the measured beats tempt every one to count. Promptly upon the twelfth stroke a second sentinel enters, with lantern and partisan; and the scene thus develops into the familiar but always interesting "change of the watch."

With two persons now on the stage, conversation begins. And without a moment's delay Shakespeare starts to sound the keynote of the play — to arouse in us a weird feeling of mystery, and a vague fear of ominous events coming on. Francisco confesses to a strange sense of oppression: "I am sick at heart"; Bernardo nervously inquires of him: "Have you had quiet guard?" and, with ill-concealed apprehension at being left alone, requests him to urge the "companions of the watch" to "make haste."

The entrance of these "companions," Horatio and Marcellus, leads to further emphasis on uncanny omens, and to definite information about "the dreaded sight" that had thrice distilled the watchers "almost to jelly with the act of fear." Horatio's frank skepticism about the Ghost ("Tush!

Tush! 'Twill not appear!") arouses in us the natural desire to see the doubter put to confusion. With a superior smile, he agrees to let his friends "once more" repeat their story; and so they all seat themselves, while Bernardo essays the narrative. Just as the speaker's involved clauses and annoying emphasis on irrelevant details begin to exhaust our patience, his utterance is cut short by the entrance of the Ghost itself.

Why, we may ask, does Shakespeare introduce the Ghost in the first few moments of the play? It does not speak a single word. It stalks across the stage, and goes out; but it says nothing. Why, then, does he bring in the Ghost at all? Obviously it is a shrewd trick on his part to catch the attention of the audience.

And having now by this artifice caught attention, he seeks, without delay, to impart some of the introductory information essential to an understanding of the plot. Therefore he sends the Ghost off the stage — to return, however, at line 127; in other words, he excuses the Ghost for about ten minutes in order that he may address the audience without the distraction of a specter before their eyes.

"Good now," says Marcellus, "sit down, and tell me, he that *knows*"; and there follows information about the elder King Hamlet, recently dead; about young Fortinbras; and about the general uneasy state of affairs in Denmark. At the same time the dramatist seizes the opportunity to strike again, and more insistently, the keynote of tragedy. Horatio points out that the appearance of a ghost is always ominous; and that the return of the recently buried king, to stalk in full armor about the royal palace, is a mote to trouble the mind's eye.

At last, however, the audience becomes somewhat wearied by these long speeches of information, and its interest must be rearoused. Nothing will do this so effectively as the Ghost; and hence Shakespeare fetches it in again.

When it reënters, Horatio bars its way, and formally conjures it to reveal its message. The Ghost yields. Slowly and solemnly it lifts its arms, and addresses itself to speech. So tense is the audience that one could hear a pin fall. The mouth of the Ghost opens; its lips are seen to move; every person strains his ears to hear. But just as the Ghost starts to speak, a loud cock-crow interrupts, and the Ghost, dropping its arms in fear, hurries away.

Why does Shakespeare make the Ghost actually start to speak, and then interrupt its utterance with the unexpected cock-crow? Clearly his purpose is to *rivet* the attention of the spectators by arousing their curiosity. The device is not unknown to our present-day magazine editor, who will take his readers to a most exciting moment in a story, and then add "To be continued in our next."

So in this scene Shakespeare twice uses the Ghost; but he does not allow it to speak a single word. And he keeps it from speaking because the audience is not yet prepared to hear any important revelation — not even aware of the existence of young Hamlet, or of Hamlet's treacherous uncle, or of his recently married mother. Hence further introductory scenes are needed; and the message of the Ghost must be reserved until the audience has been more fully informed.

The crowing of the cock enables the artist neatly to end the scene with a reference to the light of morn, the coming of which naturally breaks up the watch.

Act I, Scene II

Scene II is primarily devoted to introducing to us the chief personages of the play — with the exception of Ophelia, who is reserved for a special scene immediately to follow. It is true that many of the antecedent events necessary to an understanding of the plot are here disclosed; but our main

interest lies in meeting these highly important and interesting people, and framing our estimate of their characters.

When in everyday life we are introduced to a man, we invariably form what we call a "first impression"; and so strong and lasting is this first impression that it largely shapes our judgment of that man's subsequent conduct. In the narrower world of the drama, and especially of tragedy, these first impressions are even more important. Obviously, therefore, in beginning to study so subtle a play as *Hamlet* we must be careful to form correct opinions of the main personages, for if we fail here we are likely afterwards to err in judging the behavior of those personages, and, as a result, have unnecessary difficulty in arriving at a clear knowledge of the dramatist's meaning. In an actual stage-performance strong first impressions are stamped upon our minds by the actors, each of whom gives us in an unmistakable way his "interpretation" of the person he presents. But we must not assume that an interpretation furnished by some particular actor whom by chance we may have seen is necessarily the right one; for entirely different interpretations of a dramatic part are possible. It is for this reason that to-day the author of a play usually is called upon to instruct his actors in a correct representation of his characters. Accordingly, if we wish to gain a true understanding of *Hamlet* we should make an effort to discover Shakespeare's own conception of the persons he created.

It is well to remember that, as with our modern dramatists, Shakespeare supervised the production of his plays — a task for which he was eminently qualified, since he was not only the author with a clear notion of exactly what effects he wished to produce, but also an experienced actor with full knowledge of histrionic art. And we must believe that in staging his own plays, and in drilling his actors in the proper interpretation of their parts, he was very particular. We get a glimpse of his interest in such matters — and perhaps

of his method — in the directions of Hamlet to the players: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you."

How helpful to us would be Shakespeare's directions to his own actors, if only we possessed them! Unfortunately they are not preserved. The printed texts supply nothing save a few colorless phrases, chiefly *enter* and *exit*; and the long suppression of acting during the period of the Commonwealth (1640–62) made a break in the continuity of Shakespearean production which lost to the stage virtually all the dramatist's original instructions. We are able, however, to gain some notion of their value from certain passages in the journal of John Downes, stage-manager of Lincoln's Inn Theater in 1662:

> The tragedy of *Hamlet*; Hamlet being performed by Mr. Betterton, Sir William [Davenant] having seen Mr. Taylor of the Blackfriars Company act it, who, being instructed by [Mr. Burbage, who was instructed by] the author Mr. Shakespeare, taught Mr. Betterton in every particle of it; which, by his exact performance of it, gained him esteem and reputation superlative to all other plays.

Betterton, it will be noted, secured Shakespeare's instructions at fourth hand, and that faintly; yet he was able to achieve a result that astonished London audiences. The enthusiasm of Downes, as various critics who saw Betterton's performance testify, was fully justified. For instance, Samuel Pepys, an inveterate playgoer and shrewd judge of actors, witnessed the performance at Lincoln's Inn, and wrote in his Diary: "I saw *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* done with scenes, very well; but above all Betterton did the Prince's part *beyond imagination*!" So fascinated was Pepys by this remarkable interpretation of "the Prince's part" that he went to Lincoln's Inn a second time, and recorded in his Diary his maturer impression: "Saw *Hamlet* done, giving us fresh reason *never to think enough of Betterton*!" Still a third time he was drawn to witness the play; and on this

occasion he wrote: "Saw *Hamlet*; . . . mightily pleased with it, but above all with Betterton [as the Prince] — *the best part, I believe, that ever man acted*!" And Pepys' judgment is supported by many other writers of the day, all of whom express themselves in superlatives.

Betterton was able to get Shakespeare's "own instructions" for one other play only; and Downes duly records the result:

> *King Henry VIII.* . . . The part of the King was so right and justly done by Mr. Betterton, he being instructed in it by Sir William, who had it from old Mr. Lowen, [who had it from Richard Burbage], that had his instructions from Mr. Shakespeare himself, that I dare, and will, aver none can, or will, come near him in this age in the performance of that part.

Now, in the absence of "Master Shakespeare himself" to tell us how his characters should be interpreted, in the absence of Richard Burbage, or John Taylor, or Sir William Davenant to tell us, and in the absence even of a stage-tradition worthy of confidence, we must depend upon our own acumen. We must, with the shrewdness of a detective, carefully search the text for evidence revealing the dramatist's imaginative conception of his personages; and then we must try to reconstruct those personages in our minds as Shakespeare himself conceived of them.

The first one set before our eyes is Claudius, the present ruler of Denmark and the uncle of Prince Hamlet. What, we should ask, are his age, his physical appearance, his character as they impress us on first sight? In other words, what should be the actor's impersonation of Claudius in order to make him conform to the author's imaginative conception?

As to his age, we cannot speak with assurance (a detail of this sort Shakespeare could take care of by oral instruction); yet we may fairly assume that he is younger, perhaps considerably younger, than his brother, whom he succeeded on

the throne. The dead King Hamlet seems to have been "verging on eld." His hair was "sable silvered"; and in "The Mouse-Trap" his son represents him as saying to his wife:

> Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too;
> My operant powers their functions leave to do.

In Claudius, however, there is nothing to suggest the enfeeblement of age; on the contrary he seems to be in the prime of vigorous manhood, in this respect not essentially different from Prince Hamlet. Possibly he is on the near side of forty — certainly a young rather than an old man. The point is of special significance in connection with his hurried marriage to the elderly widow of the former King.

As to his physical appearance, we have abundant evidence that he is unattractive, even repulsive. His body, we are told, is "like a mildewed ear," and his face "bloated." The people of Denmark were accustomed to "make mows" [= grimaces] at his picture. His brother describes him as "a wretch, whose natural gifts [that is, gifts of nature] were poor to those of mine." Hamlet, thinking of his external appearance, likens him to "a satyr," the Greek personification of what is physically disgusting; to "a paddock" [= toad], "a bat," "a filthy moor," "a vice" [= clown] (see especially III, IV, 53–81; the First Quarto is not less explicit: "With a face like Vulcan, a look fit for a murder and a rape; a dull, dead, hanging look, and a hell-bred eye, to affright children"). Thus in bodily defects Claudius is somewhat akin to that other villain Richard III. To be sure he is not, like Richard, hunchbacked, but he is entirely devoid of those physical qualities which render a man attractive.

As to the impression his character makes upon us, that surely is in keeping with the ugliness of his body; for he is the villain of the play, the sole source of all the crimes, sufferings, and deaths. Take Claudius away and there

would have been no tragedy at the Court of Denmark. He is "treacherous" and "remorseless"; he cruelly murders his own brother, and he tries with foul means to murder his nephew. By craft he has "stolen the crown" — Hamlet calls him "a cutpurse of the empire." Nor is criminal ambition, which may sometimes be touched with grandeur, his only vice. He is notorious as a drunkard — a "bloat king," who nightly "keeps wassail," and the "swaggering upspring reels." And to intemperance in drink he adds sexual debauchery. The Ghost describes him as an "adulterate beast"; Hamlet repeatedly refers to him as "lecherous"; and both the Ghost and Hamlet brand him as "incestuous."

Yet Claudius is not without ability of certain sorts; otherwise he could not have won Gertrude, or persuaded the statesmen of the realm to place the crown upon his head. The Ghost speaks of "the witchcraft of his wit," that is, his adroitness in the use of flattery; and we find him at all times employing this means to gain his ends. And here, no doubt, we have the cue to the one recorded peculiarity of his manner — his *constant smiling*. It is not, of course, the open, frank smile of good nature, but the fulsome, saccharine smile of deception; for, as Hamlet observes, "A man may smile and smile, and be a villain." We are all familiar with that type of man, and hate him quite as much as did Hamlet; yet, as a rule, he is able to win favor with people, and to advance himself farther than would seem possible. In addition to shrewd flattery, Claudius, as the Ghost tells us, knows also how to use "rich gifts." Indeed, so successful is he in the employment of these his two chief weapons, flattery and bribery, that he has secured from the politicians of the Court his election to the throne in spite of Hamlet's being the idol of the people of Denmark.

Nor is Claudius without the qualities that we identify with business efficiency. In the present scene he reveals himself as a shrewd executive, dispatching affairs with

orderly precision and speed. We may well believe that, had he possessed moral qualities to match his obvious ability in handling men and matters, he would have made an eminently successful ruler.

The next person we are called upon to look at is the widow of the "sable silvered" King who had recently died. Gertrude is no longer young. Her son Hamlet is thirty years of age; she is described as a "matron" in a way that implies advanced years; and in one passage she is scornfully held up as the very antithesis of "youth." The adjective "frost" applied to her suggests not only spent passion, but also, perhaps, white hairs. Hamlet makes it plain that it is her advanced years ("at your age!" he says to her) that renders her marriage to Claudius so astounding.

In view of her frosty age it is not surprising that we find no reference to her as beautiful (save Ophelia's mad utterance "Where is the beauteous majesty of Denmark?" which may have been meant for the King). Perhaps beauty was never her chief appeal. Instead, the distinguishing quality emphasized in her throughout the play is a demonstrative, clinging nature. We are told that during the more than thirty years of her marriage to her first husband —

> She would hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown
> By what it fed on.

And in "The Mouse-Trap," her son lays stress on this notable characteristic of hers: "Enter a King and Queen, very lovingly, the Queen embracing him," etc. In her new relations with Claudius, too, she is constantly exhibiting the same demonstrative quality, "honeying and making love" in a way that disgusts her son.

The first bit of "information" given to us in the scene is that the ugly and villainous Claudius has just married the elderly Gertrude. In his shrewd plan to "steal" the throne,

he had rushed the matronly widow in most unseemly haste to the altar, mingling "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage." And then, by flattering the politicians of the corrupt Court — of whom Polonius is both the leader and the type — by smiling and smiling upon them, he had induced them to elect him to the throne of Denmark, the more plausibly, no doubt, because of his marriage to Gertrude, "the imperial jointress of this warlike state." Thus we have a union that is rendered repulsive in various ways. In the first place, a man in the prime of life weds an elderly woman for the sake of advancing his personal ambition. In the second place, in order to profit by the marriage he forces it with unheard-of speed, "within a month," a fact that outrages human feeling. In the third place, he is physically most unattractive; as Hamlet said to his mother, in such a union there could be no romance — "You cannot call it love." And, finally, the marriage is only too obviously a part of a scheme to cheat Hamlet of the throne — an injury done him by his own mother and his uncle. In view of all these circumstances, it is small wonder that the young Prince is sick of life, and that to him the world seems entirely corrupt: "Things rank and gross in nature possess it merely."

Such, then, was the nature of the marriage. The election to the throne and the coronation immediately followed (Laertes had journeyed from Paris to Elsinore only in order to attend the coronation, and now, "that duty done," is eagerly hurrying back to Paris); and the present scene shows us the new King holding his first public audience.

Naturally the royal pair, seated in state upon the canopied throne, occupy the center of attention. Yet by means of a shrewd stage-effect Shakespeare draws the eyes of the spectators to a certain young man who seems strangely out of place in this gathering. Claudius, Gertrude, the lords and ladies, and all the gallants constituting Court society, are

dressed in bright colors and are merry in spirits, as befits a happy marriage and coronation. Hamlet, however, is garbed in solemn black and presents a sad countenance and mourning attitude, as befits a funeral. Naturally he feels separated in mood from the crowd of joyous and gayly costumed persons attendant upon the bride and groom, and he stands off by himself, melancholy in posture, veritably a black spot on the stage. The contrast is so striking that it teases the curiosity of the audience. Shakespeare, however, does not at once introduce the hero. That must be reserved for a climax.

Claudius, in this his first public utterance, feels called upon to express sorrow at the recent death of his "dear brother"; but his declarations of grief are so "rhetorical" both in substance and in form that we easily detect in them the hollow ring of insincerity. He feels called upon, also, to justify the speed with which he has married the bereaved widow, almost before the funeral services of her husband — his "dear brother" — are ended. He declares that, though some show of grief for the death of his brother were fitting, he must also remember *himself* and look out for his *own happiness*. But his chief defense lies in shrewdly making the whole Court share with him the responsibility for everything he has done. With his ingratiating smile, he says to the assembled crowd:

> Nor have we herein barr'd
> Your better wisdoms, which have freely gone
> With this affair along. For all, our thanks.

The phrase "this affair" clearly means not only the hasty marriage to Gertrude, but also its concomitant, the theft of the throne from Hamlet. It is thus obvious that the leaders of the Court are corrupt, and that they "all" stand on the side of the villain.

From speaking of himself and of his personal affairs,

Claudius turns next to business of State. We must confess that he handles the Fortinbras difficulty with marked efficiency, dispatching the ambassadors to the King of Norway with every detail nicely cared for.

That matter finished, he addresses Laertes: "And now, Laertes." As the young man thus designated advances before the throne, our eyes are inquisitively bent upon him. From his gaudy Parisian costume, his waving ostrich-plumes, and his general appearance and bearing of a fop, we suspect that there is no superabundance of brains in his head; and for a moment we are puzzled at the exaggerated graciousness of the King toward him. But the reason for that graciousness is soon revealed; Laertes' aged father Polonius, we learn, is the Lord High Chamberlain and "chiefest courtier" of the realm. The fulsome way in which Claudius heaps flattery on the old fellow gives us an excellent illustration of the means by which he had induced the politicians of the Court to set the crown upon his head.

Having finally dispatched Laertes toward Paris, the King next turns to Hamlet — to the last and most difficult matter he has to deal with. Putting on his most saccharine smile, he says: "But now, my cousin [= nephew], and my son."

As Hamlet, thus addressed, slowly raises his eyes, the attention of the entire audience is bent upon him.

Since the Elizabethan theater-goers would see before them Hamlet as impersonated under the author's direction, there was no need in the text for a description of his age, physical appearance, dress, manners, qualities of character, and the like. Yet from hints dropped here and there throughout the play we are able fairly well to reconstruct Shakespeare's conception of his hero.

In three different passages we learn that Hamlet is thirty years of age. Clearly Shakespeare thought of him, not as an immature youth, like Romeo or Orlando, in whom passion, sweeping all before it, rushes headlong into action, but as a

man whose mind has reached full maturity, and whose intellectual reactions are therefore worth study.

His costume of somber black we have already remarked on. But his dress is noteworthy not merely for its dark color, so strangely contrasting with the vestments of the other persons on the stage; it is also distinguished, we may be sure, by exquisite good taste. Ophelia tells us that in matters of dress he was "the glass of fashion"; and his present suit of black velvet, set off with the conventional gold chain about his neck, must have been pleasing in style and impeccable in every detail. The point is of some importance, for later we are to see him "transformed" into a sloven, careless of his "exterior" — the most startling evidence of his having presumably lost his wits.

In bodily appearance he is very attractive, possessing the handsomeness of face and perfection of physique that one associates with heroes. Ophelia speaks of his "unmatch'd form and feature." Claudius explains the fact that Hamlet is idolized of the common people by saying that they "like not in their judgment, *but their eyes*"; and his good looks must, in a similar way, have instantly won for him the sympathy of the entire audience.

Further, he is, we are told, richly endowed with the finer social graces. By the Court he was regarded as the very "mould of form," and in matters of polite behavior he was "the observed of all observers." Ophelia sums up these qualities in the one word "courtier."

Yet he is more than a mere courtier. He is also, Ophelia tells us, distinguished as a "soldier." As the only son of a famous warrior — "valiant Hamlet, for so this side of our known world esteem'd him" — and as the heir-apparent to a most "warlike state," he must have seen actual service on the battlefield. His skill in the use of arms is revealed by his contest with Laertes. His leading the attack against the pirates and, single-handed, boarding their ship, "a galley of very

warlike appointment," shows his courage in actual fight. And doubtless similar heroic deeds (perhaps against the English King who had recently been defeated by his father: "since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red after the Danish sword") further served to make him the idol of the common people. Nor should it be overlooked that at the end of the play Fortinbras, whose main interest lay in the sword, orders for Hamlet — not for the King or the rest — a soldier's burial: "Let four captains bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage, . . . and, for his passage, the soldier's music and the rites of war speak loudly for him."

Finally, to the qualities of "courtier" and "soldier" Shakespeare adds the quality of "scholar." By nature Hamlet had been endowed with a profound intellect, and this intellect had been cultivated by long residence at the university. Throughout the play his utterances reveal his philosophical bent of mind, and show how well-trained were his mental faculties. He is not, of course, a scholar in the narrower sense of the word. Shakespeare merely wished to represent him as in this respect fulfilling one of the requisites in the Elizabethan concept of "the complete gentleman" — that is, the well-rounded, or ideal gentleman, as described, for instance, in Castiglione's *Courtier*, or as exemplified by Sir Philip Sidney. In the light of this fine concept one should read Ophelia's description of him:

> O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!
> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword!
> The expectancy and rose of the fair State!
> The glass of fashion, and the mould of form;
> The observ'd of all observers.

Such is the handsome and accomplished young man who turns to face Claudius.

To his uncle's smiling question: "My son, how is it that the clouds still hang on you?" Hamlet retorts, with the quickness of a rapier thrust: "Not so, my lord; I am *too*

much i' the sun." The last phrase comes as a slap in the King's face: for me to be called your "son" is "too much" for endurance. But Hamlet's pun involves more than the idea of kinship; "in the sun" was conventional with Elizabethan writers as meaning "in the sunshine of royal eyes, smiled upon by the sovereign." Hamlet resents the usurper's fulsome display of affection toward him. And with this cutting retort, he turns his back on him.

Claudius being thus put to rout in the presence of the whole Court, Gertrude seeks to come to the rescue. Hamlet, it will be observed, treats his mother with formal respect; yet he cannot refrain from giving vent to some of his resentment at her recent conduct. When of the death of loved ones she says: "Thou know'st 'tis common," he mockingly bows to her in her gay wedding costume: "Ay, madam, it is — common!" And when, ignoring his biting sarcasm, she replies: "If it be, why seems it so particular with thee?" he snaps her up on the only too apparent hypocrisy of her grief: "*Seems*, madam!"

Claudius, having recovered his composure, now tries again. And he makes the same mistake of putting Hamlet "too much i' the sun." With his fulsome smile he bends his eyes on the young man: "Think of us as of a father"; "With no less nobility of love than that which dearest father bears his son." And having thus, as he thinks, soothed Hamlet with flattery, he suddenly drives at the point: "For your intent in going back to school in Wittenberg, it is most retrograde to our [= the royal pronoun] desire!" The usurper must keep under close observation the man whom he has cheated, and therefore fears.

Hamlet scorns to reply. With obvious disdain, he turns his back on the speaker. The situation is most embarrassing; and again Gertrude must come to the rescue of her husband. She now wisely makes her appeal to filial duty: "Let not thy *mother* lose her prayers, Hamlet." And to this

appeal he is forced to yield: "I shall, in all my best, obey *you*, madam." The emphasis, marked by a bow, is painfully on the word "you." Yet Claudius, eager to make the best of a bad situation, and to escape from the presence of so annoying a person as Hamlet, exclaims: "Madam, come! This gentle and unforc'd accord of Hamlet sits smiling to my heart. . . . Come; away!" And the gay Court, reviving its merriment, follow the King and Queen out.

Hamlet does not stir. After a few moments, the sounds of merriment die away in the distance, and the young Prince, left alone on the stage, begins to speak.

Why did Shakespeare hold Hamlet back? Obviously to introduce him to us more intimately, to give us a clearer and deeper glimpse into his soul; for at the beginning of the play we must be set right concerning the hero. And to accomplish this Shakespeare makes use of a soliloquy, the dramatist's quickest and surest method of revealing the heart. We should therefore give careful attention to this soliloquy, for in it the author will furnish information as to Hamlet's strange mental state, with which information, as with a key, we should be able to unlock the mystery of his subsequent behavior. We cannot say his subsequent *action*, for he does nothing. If we are to solve the great problem of the play, we must explain his *failure to act.*

The last point needs to be stressed; for in *Hamlet* Shakespeare concentrates attention not on plot but on character, and, specifically, the character of one man, the hero. Further, in the analysis and delineation of that character he expends the full powers of his subtle intellect. Our main task, therefore, will be to acquire a correct understanding of the young Prince's *character*, and of the effects produced on that character by the tragic experiences through which he is forced to pass. In other words, we must first understand the *man* Hamlet before we can hope to understand the play.

Shakespeare's heroes are never commonplace persons.

They possess, it is true, very human qualities, such as we easily recognize in ourselves or in others; but they possess these qualities in a superlative degree. This truth we see well exemplified in Hamlet. He is not an ordinary mortal; his whole being is cast in an unusually fine mould. His moral nature — he is invariably termed "noble Hamlet" — is notable for its loftiness and its exquisite susceptibility. He feels the deepest horror at the insincerity of his mother, at the intemperance of his uncle, at the politic craft of Polonius, at any slightest deviation from the path of exact rectitude. In the play, as he moves amidst corruption and crime, he seems almost to possess moral grandeur. Equally notable is his intellect. His mind, keen, clear, and penetrating, has always excited the admiration of the world; he is, indeed, as he has been frequently called, "an intellectual genius," with something of the poet's imagination and something of the philosopher's power of arriving at fundamental truths. And, finally, his emotional nature is profound and easily stirred. As a result he readily becomes, as he confesses, "passion's slave"; note, for example, how the bad taste of Laertes at the grave, offending his æsthetic sensibility, throws him into "a towering rage." A man with an emotional nature so intense and so sensitive as this will necessarily be "a pipe for Fortune's finger, to sound what stop she please."

But these three qualities, always well developed in a truly great man, are not potentially tragic. They might, under certain circumstances, cause intense suffering, as, indeed, they do in this play; yet in themselves they would not lead to disaster. It is Shakespeare's custom to endow his heroes with *some quality that will impair the judgment*, and so constitute a definite source of danger. This quality is not necessarily bad in kind (Shakespeare's heroes are usually lovable), but possessed in over measure it may, under certain special conditions, prove tragic.

What, then, is the judgment-impairing quality possessed by Hamlet in over measure? The answer should be unmistakable; and it is. The young Prince possesses to a fatal extent *idealism regarding human nature*. Just as the tragic flaw in Macbeth was "vaulting ambition," in Lear "hideous rashness," in Othello sexual jealousy, so in Hamlet it is too easy a faith in human nature: "What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! . . . in action how like an angel!" Not without cause did the villain observe of him that being "most generous and free from all contriving" he would not peruse the foils — would *never* suspect ill in others.

We can readily understand how Hamlet, by nature noble and trustful, never had lost this beautiful idealism of childhood. As a prince and the heir-apparent, he was reared under the fostering shelter of the Court; and as the only son of fond parents, he was an object of tenderest solicitude. His mother, who "lived almost by his looks," lavished upon him in her demonstrative way an unbounded affection. His father ("my dear father," "my noble father," Hamlet calls him), a "majestical" King, in whom "all the gods did seem to set their seal to give the world assurance of *a man*," centered his pride in his son. We are not surprised that he addresses Hamlet as "thou noble youth," and talks with him in a manner that indicates the closest comradeship. Thus the young Prince had seen only the bright side of the world, and had come in contact with only the finer qualities of human nature. To him the earth was "a goodly frame," the heavens "a majestical roof fretted with golden fire," and man — the acme of creation — "what a piece of work"! He idolized his mother as the personification of all that was pure and true in womanhood; he worshiped his father as the summation of all that was manly. With unquestioning heart he fell in love with the pretty but weak Ophelia. He regarded the treacherous Laertes as "a very noble youth,"

and "loved him ever" as a "brother." He accepted into his very "heart of hearts" his schoolfellows — even the despicable Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In short, this young prince, whose life is suddenly crossed by a domestic tragedy involving the foulest crimes, is almost a complete idealist. This beautiful idealism it is that makes us love him; it is the secret of the affection the people of Denmark had for him; it is the secret of the admiration readers have for him to-day. And it explains why, after he had been mangled by the sinfulness of the world, Shakespeare utters over his dead body the tender words:

> Good night, sweet prince!
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

Up to the time that the play opens, this idealistic faith of his had served merely to render the "sweet prince" happy and beloved. And idealism being essentially a noble quality would not, in the course of a normal life, prove fatal. How, then, is the dramatist to convert Hamlet's fine trust in human nature into a tragic flaw ultimately leading to disaster?

Before attempting to answer that question we may profitably examine Shakespeare's treatment of his other heroes. Macbeth was "a peerless kinsman," and by his upright life had won "golden opinions" from all people; Lear was an affectionate father, beloved by every one, and until "four score and upwards" had ruled wisely and successfully; Othello was thoroughly noble in nature, generous of soul, and had always been a perfect master of himself. Each of these men had lived a long and useful life, and would normally have died in peace and honor. Yet for each of them the dramatist created a special, one might almost say the unique, situation in which his one judgment-impairing quality — ambition, rashness, jealousy — would prove fatal.

In precisely the same way Shakespeare must devise for Hamlet a situation in which his trust in human nature will become a tragic flaw — will lead to unbearable suffering, to errors in judgment, and finally to destruction. And since idealism can produce suffering only when it is subjected to disillusionment, the dramatist's plan is to subject the idealism in this sensitive young man to a sudden and horrible disillusionment. A series of blows, coming one fast on the heels of another, is to shatter his very being, and make him reel upon the verge of madness. Some one has said: "The most terrible thing in the world is the disillusionment of an idealist." The disillusionment of Hamlet is both swift and terrible.

And it is the special task of the dramatist to reveal the effect of this disillusionment upon the highly moral, intellectual, and emotional young prince. The most obvious effect — a moment's thought should tell us that this is inevitable — will be melancholia. The play, therefore, involves a study of melancholia.[1] But it would be a grave error to assume that Shakespeare's main interest lies in revealing the symptoms of this emotional illness. His prime interest lies in a study of the *disillusionment* of an idealist; melancholia is thus merely incidental. Yet so important is it for an understanding of Hamlet's behavior that we must know its general features. And since Shakespeare gradually reveals these features as they develop in the increasing seriousness of Hamlet's condition, we may at the outset content ourselves with the more elementary symptoms.

[1] The notion that Hamlet was suffering from melancholia appears in the old play Shakespeare reworked. For instance, in the early German version of *Hamlet*, as carried abroad by traveling English actors, we find: "dass sie ist über Eure Melancholie"; "Mein König, ich habe grosse Betrübnisse über die Melancholie meines Sohnes Hamlets"; "Ach Himmel! wie hat doch die Melancholie diesen Prinzen so viele Raserey zugebracht!" And in portions of the First Quarto representing an early version, we find lines such as: "He straightway grew into a melancholy"; "What means these sad and melancholy moods?" Shakespeare himself makes Hamlet speak of "my melancholy."

Modern psychologists who have written on mental troubles have listed certain outstanding symptoms by which we are to recognize what is called "simple" or "sub-acute" melancholia. The first symptom is technically known as *tedium vitae*, or weariness of life. The patient thinks the world full of corruption, and all human nature vile. So distressing is this discovery to him that he wishes he had never been born. And hence the second symptom, the suicidal impulse. The melancholic person constantly meditates on taking his life as a grateful escape from existence in so corrupt a world; yet, though the thought is often present, the resolution to carry it into effect is weak. A third symptom is the desire for solitude. The melancholic avoids people; he is out of tune with merrymaking, or any form of human companionship; he wishes only to be let alone. From this springs a fourth symptom, irritability (compare the dyspeptic, who is usually touched with melancholia). He makes cutting remarks to those who force themselves upon him; he is cross in his replies to those who casually address him; and he actually derives a certain pleasure in thus hurting people's feelings. A fifth symptom is gloomy brooding. The patient constantly mopes; his mind dwells upon real or imaginary troubles; he magnifies the vileness of others, and even condemns himself as utterly contemptible.

That Shakespeare in *Hamlet* should make use of melancholia is not at all strange, for the Elizabethan age was profoundly interested in this curious mental affection. Numerous treatises were published on its causes and symptoms; young gentlemen affected it as an aristocratic pose ("your melancholy," writes Jonson, "is your only fine humor"); and in the literature of the day, especially in the drama (one instantly recalls "the melancholy Jaques" of *As You Like It*), the melancholy type became a vogue. Good evidence has been adduced to show that Shakespeare was familiar with several formal studies of the disease, notably with Dr.

Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie*, 1586; yet his remarkably intimate knowledge of its effects doubtless was derived from actual observation of its working on some one close to him, or, what is more likely, from his own personal experience with a serious and prolonged attack. How exact was his understanding of its symptomatology may be shown by citing a few modern authorities. The German psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing, in *Psychiatry* (translated by Chaddock, 1905), writes:

> The fundamental phenomenon in melancholia consists of the painful emotional depression. . . . The content of the melancholic consciousness is psychic pain, distress, and depression. . . . The solidarity of the psychic activities causes the depression to be total; the psychic organ is incapable of calling up any other than painful psychic activities. . . . Psychic dysesthesia causes the patient to be retiring, with desire to avoid people, or to assume a hostile attitude towards the external world; psychic anesthesia causes indifference even to the most important things of life. . . . This abnormal excitability expresses itself clinically in irritability, sensitiveness, and moodiness. . . . The mental need of quiet in the patient is expressed in retiring from society and seeking isolation.

Macpherson, in *Mental Affections* (1899), writes:

> The characteristic feature of melancholia is a morbid depression of feeling, which expresses itself in every degree, from silent resignation up to the most violent despair. . . . In company he [the victim of "sub-acute" melancholia] may be able to converse rationally, even brilliantly; but at the same time he experiences a great disinclination for the society of others, and prefers to be alone with his thoughts. . . . The most important symptom in this [simple], as in all forms of melancholia, is the presence of the suicidal impulse. . . . Subacute melancholia generally occurs suddenly. . . . An exciting cause is generally assigned by the patient and his friends, such as business worries, a financial loss, or the death of relatives.

Régis, in *Manuel pratique de médecine mentale* (a work which was crowned by the Faculty of Medicine of Paris, and received the Chateauville Prize; translated by H. M. Bannister, 1895), writes:

Sub-acute Melancholia (*melancholic depression*). The whole is comprised in or limited to a general condition of depression, inaction, and impotence. The patients avoid all labor, all occupation, and all society; they isolate themselves; . . . [they are] incapable of wishing, or deciding on, or of making an effort. This is simple melancholic depression.

Now, with these outstanding characteristics of "simple melancholia" in mind, let us turn to Shakespeare's soliloquy revealing Hamlet's mental state. All soliloquies, of course, are important; this one is especially important, for, *placed in scene that introduces the hero to us*, it is designed to set us straight at the outset regarding Hamlet's condition of mind, and thus start us on the right path to an understanding of his subsequent behavior. The soliloquy is further significant in that it is uttered *before Hamlet knows anything about the murder that had been committed;* for as yet he does not suspect that his father had met with foul play.

Having just vented his irritability on Claudius, and having, by refusing to accompany the gay Court out, secured for himself solitude, he stands alone, dressed in somber black, and sunk in gloom. At last his thoughts break into speech, giving us, in cross-section as it were, a typical specimen of his brooding. His very first utterance reveals a weariness of life; his second, the suicidal impulse. He feels that the whole world is utterly vile, that "things rank and gross" possess it absolutely; he wishes that he had never been born, or that he could now escape from an unbearable existence by "self-slaughter." The soliloquy can leave no doubt in our minds that he has already fallen into a state of melancholia.

But what was the cause of this melancholia? Shakespeare makes the answer unmistakable. It was not sorrow at the death of his father; Hamlet does not once refer to that. He could bear that loss, for his father was so noble, so altogether admirable, that the memory of him sweetened grief. Sorrow

of this nature is purifying; it never destroys faith in human nature. Nor was it the loss of the throne. It is true that Claudius had cheated him, had stolen the crown and put it in his pocket. But Hamlet does not once mention that loss; it is, in comparison with his real grief, too trivial a thing even to come into his mind. Nor, again, was it the murder of his father, for as yet he is not aware that any crime had been committed. None of these things was the cause of his melancholia. Yet that cause is clearly expressed — is stated and restated over and over so that we cannot possibly miss the point. It was solely the conduct of his mother; that of all women she — "even she" — should be guilty of bestial insincerity ("a beast that wants discourse of reason"), and, still worse, guilty of gross sensuality ("to post with such dexterity"). And the horror in his mind was intensified by his belief that the marriage was incestuous, a belief shared by the Ghost. We cannot ignore the fact that Hamlet twice, and the Ghost three times, characterize the union as incest; nor should we forget that their opinion, in accord with the explicit teachings of the Church, prevailed in England from the earliest times until the nineteenth century.

The sudden discovery of his mother's shameful character had fallen upon the young idealist as a crushing blow. It had plunged him — unusually sensitive to moral issues, and acutely emotional — into a painful state of depression. And his suffering is rendered worse by the fact that he can do nothing: "Break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!" He cannot, however, check his mind. "Must I remember?" he exclaims in agony. When, in spite of effort, his memory irresistibly draws him back to his mother's conduct, he shrinks in horror: "Let me not think on it!" Yet think on it, and constantly, he must.

Thus, in *introducing* to us the hero, Shakespeare represents him as deeply sunk in melancholia. That is the Hamlet of the present, and will be the Hamlet throughout the play —

the Hamlet we are to study. But we cannot fully appreciate the tragic nature of his alteration unless we have some idea of the sort of man he was before melancholia came to overwhelm him. We must know the *normal* as well as the *abnormal* Hamlet. And in order to supply us with this knowledge Shakespeare gives us glimpses of the young Prince as he was shortly before the play began.

Hamlet, we know, had recently been a student at the University of Wittenberg; but, as various bits of evidence show, he had left the university some months — possibly even a year — before the death of his father. The occasion for his leaving is not revealed; but since his father had just been engaged in a serious campaign against England, and since Ophelia speaks with pride of Hamlet's fame as a soldier, we may suspect that he had accompanied the Danish army on that campaign. After the death of his father, and after the loss of the throne, his mind turned again longingly to Wittenberg, and he planned to resume his happy life there.

From Wittenberg — the place specially identified with that earlier Hamlet we are not permitted to see — comes Horatio, a former schoolmate. Out of sheer love he had traveled to Elsinore for the funeral of Hamlet's father, in order by this act of courtesy to express sympathy in his friend's bereavement. The burial, as in the case of elaborate State funerals, had taken place one month after the death of the sovereign (so that there was adequate time for the news of the King's death to reach Wittenberg in Germany, and for Horatio to arrive in Elsinore). Almost at once came the marriage, the election of a new king, and the formal coronation. This stir of Court business possibly explains why Horatio had not yet met the Prince.

When now Horatio enters, Hamlet, brooding in melancholy thoughts, greets him coldly; then, suddenly recognizing him, leaps forward with the exclamation, "Horatio!"

and joyfully takes his hand. Forgetting for the moment his present woes (for his mind — note the twice-repeated "What make you from Wittenberg?" — naturally flies to former days at the university), he becomes his old self, and enthusiastically promises his friend a gay time: "We'll teach you to drink deep ere you depart!"

Thus, immediately after showing us Hamlet in a gloomy state of melancholia, in which, weary of life, he contemplates suicide, the dramatist shows us an entirely different Hamlet — a Hamlet who is ready for fun, gleefully hailing a college-friend, and exclaiming: We'll have a gaudy time! The two pictures, set side by side, are in startling contrast. And by means of this contrast Shakespeare reveals to us what kind of young man Hamlet was before he discovered the shameful character of his mother, and what he is now after disillusionment regarding her character — the earlier, or *normal*, Hamlet, and the present, or *abnormal*, Hamlet. Nor is this the only time the dramatist makes the contrast. It appears again with the arrival of those other college-friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and yet again with the coming of the players from Wittenberg.

When, in reply to Hamlet's light-hearted question, "What make you from Wittenberg?" Horatio mentions the funeral, Hamlet's mind is recalled from happy university days to the present. Instantly his face changes; his mood of good cheer dissolves, and, with bitter sarcasm on his mother's hasty marriage, he sinks back into melancholia. As his distress grows, he says: "My father, methinks I see my father ——" Apparently he was employing a rhetorical figure of speech, and had started to say merely that he could see his father above protesting at such shameful behavior. But Horatio, whose mind is fixed on the Ghost, is so startled that he interrupts: "O where, my lord?" With mild surprise Hamlet replies: "In my mind's eye, Horatio." Horatio then starts

to tell him of the *real* appearance of his father: "I saw him ——"; but, his courage failing, he ends lamely with "once," and to cover his embarrassment adds: "He was a goodly King." Like a flash Hamlet retorts: "He was a *man*! Take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again." Hamlet here uses the word "man" as Burns does in his poem "A man's a man for a' that."

The passage throws light on the most significant trait of the young Prince's character; his tendency to idealize people. His father was his boyish hero — a man perfect in every detail. Hamlet never refers to him without some eloquent term of admiration, as "noble," "excellent," "royal." One illustration will suffice:

> See what a grace was seated on this brow!
> Hyperion's curls! the front of Jove himself!
> An eye like Mars to threaten and command!
> A station like the herald Mercury
> New-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill!
> A combination and a form indeed
> Where every god did seem to set his seal
> To give the world assurance of a man.

Now, if such was Hamlet's boyish idealization of his father, is it not a fair inference that he had in the same way idealized his mother? Perhaps his idealization of his mother was more complete. By nature she was, we are told, exceedingly affectionate, and further, exceedingly demonstrative in her affection; and her love for her only son was the chief passion of her life; as Claudius says, she "lives almost by his looks." Accordingly, in all her relations with him she must have been superlatively tender; and in return he must have idolized her as the perfection of truth and purity, for not only is he essentially an idealist, but every boy thus idealizes his mother.

Finally Horatio delivers the news of the appearance of the Ghost; and Hamlet arranges to be present that night on

the platform. Thus Shakespeare is preparing to set in motion the wheels of the plot.

Act I, Scene III

Scene III constitutes the third and last part of the formal introduction. It is designed to introduce to us the Polonius family — an important family, because it contains the Lord High Chamberlain of the realm, representative of the Court politicians; it contains Laertes, who is to betray the hero to destruction; and it contains the woman Hamlet loves. The father, Polonius, is, not to mince matters, a conceited, pompous, long-winded old fool, of "politic" craftiness (chiefly in the way of eavesdropping), and of easy moral standards. As to his physical appearance, Hamlet gives us a caricature in a later passage: "The satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes purging thick amber or plum-tree gum; and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams."

The son, Laertes, like the father, suffers from "a plentiful lack of wit." That he is a fop of the most advanced type Osric informs us (V, II, 108–13). He is now engaged in sowing his wild oats in Paris, with his father's knowledge and approval (II, I, 18–73). Even his sister guesses that he is treading "the primrose path," and urges him to virtuous living.

The daughter, Ophelia, is young, and, like her father and her brother, not endowed with a strong intellect. She cannot think for herself even in matters that nearly concern her, and is almost wholly lacking in self-assertion. But she is beautiful, and gentle, and pure; and she loves Hamlet with all her heart.

The scene, it is true, presents to us the entire Polonius family; but it is specially designed to introduce to us the

woman Hamlet loves. Shakespeare accordingly presents Ophelia to us *in the light of this love* — in her reactions to an attack made upon the man to whom she is wholly devoted, and who loves her with all the power of his noble nature:

> I lov'd Ophelia! Forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum.

Thus we could not desire a better opportunity to judge Ophelia's character — to discover why she fails Hamlet in his hour of need.

Laertes, hurrying back to the gay life of Paris, warns his sister that Hamlet's love is shallow, merely "a toy in blood." With credulous heart and trembling lips she asks: "No more but so?" From her obvious pain Laertes sees that she deeply loves Hamlet, and hence is very gentle in his manner. He points out to her that a prince is not free to choose as he pleases; and, in a spirit of worldly wisdom, he warns her against putting any faith in the sincerity of Hamlet's declarations:

> Then weigh what loss your honor [= virtue] may sustain
> If with too credent ear you list his songs.

He even warns her against Hamlet's "unmastered importunity," lest her chastity suffer "contagious blastments." "Fear it, Ophelia," he says, "fear it."

To this attack upon the sincerity and uprightness of the man she loves, Ophelia meekly replies:

> I shall the effect of this good lesson keep
> As watchman to my heart.

Instantly we realize that something is wanting in her nature, something that was not lacking in Juliet, or in Desdemona. We especially miss that completeness of passion, that self-abandon which a great love should create in a heroine. It has been said by her apologists that she is in spirit still too

much of a child to give herself entirely to one who stood outside the family circle; that, although she loves Hamlet with a sweetness and a tenderness that are very beautiful, her love is overshadowed by long-engraffed dependence upon her father and her brother. Yet when we recall that Juliet, who was less than fourteen years of age, and Desdemona, who was "the most childlike of Shakespeare's women," were inspired by their love to defy not only their father and their family but also the whole society in which they moved, we demand more than immaturity as an explanation of Ophelia's conduct. Nor does Shakespeare fail to meet our demand. A few lines later he creates another and even more savage attack upon her lover, in order more clearly to reveal in her a weakness adequate to explain why she fails to rise to heroic heights.

At line 52, Polonius is fetched in to be introduced to us. We must make no mistake about him: he is the comic character in the play — until he is killed; and after that Shakespeare has to create first the two graveyard clowns, and later Osric, to supply humor. He is pompous; he is conceited; he likes to hear himself talk; he is the author of that famous phrase "Brevity is the soul of wit," yet never exhibits the slightest signs of brevity. And, like all pompous individuals, he is fond of giving advice. In the present scene he heaps upon Laertes much tedious advice in the form of pithy "precepts." The humor of his seeming "wisdom" lies in its *utter triteness*. He gathers age-old "saws" embodying the most obvious platitudes, and retails these with amusing solemnity.

So he bustles in full of pomposity, and at once begins to flood the stage with stale precepts. It is no time to give casual advice: "Yet here, Laertes! Aboard! aboard, for shame! The wind sits in the shoulder of your sail, and you are stay'd for." Besides, he has already gone through that tiresome operation in an earlier leave-taking. But, in spite

of the imperative need for haste, in spite of the fact that the ship, the sailors, the wind, and the passengers are waiting, Polonius' fondness for trite wisdom gets the better of him, and he holds Laertes back in order to give vent to what he calls a "few" precepts.

It is, indeed, amusing how the intellectually middle class like tags of worldly wisdom or platitudinous sentiment. We find such offered for sale in stores, sometimes beautifully illuminated, and neatly framed to be hung on the wall. This trait in human nature seems to have stirred Shakespeare's sense of humor; and in the present scene he is slyly laughing in his sleeve, well knowing that the world is full of "bromides" who will take Polonius seriously.

At last Laertes is able to escape. As he goes out, he darkly hints to Ophelia: "Remember well what I have said to you"; and she replies: "'Tis in my memory locked, and you yourself shall keep the key of it." Instantly Polonius whirls upon her: "What is it, Ophelia, he hath said to you?" And here we discover another marked characteristic of the old man — curiosity. He sends a servant to spy on Laertes in Paris; and he was eavesdropping behind the arras when Hamlet whipped out his sword and killed him: "A rat? Dead, for a ducat!"

And now from Polonius, who lacked the insight and the gentle sympathy of Laertes, comes a most cruel attack upon the character of the young Prince. Polonius denies that Hamlet entertains for Ophelia any love at all. When she mildly protests that he has "made many tenders of his affection" to her, the sneering old man ("Pooh!") asks: "Do you *believe* his 'tenders'?" The question is a direct challenge to her faith in her lover; let us, therefore, listen with the ears of Hamlet for her reply: "I do not know, my lord, what I should think."

That answer sufficiently characterizes her. Imagine Juliet saying of Romeo: "I do not know what I should

think"! Imagine her reaction to an attack upon Romeo's honor! Her black eyes would flash, and her tongue leap to the defense of the man she loved. Imagine Rosalind's reaction! or Portia's! But Ophelia confesses: "I do not know, my lord, what I should think." Polonius' retort, "Marry, I'll teach you: think yourself *a baby*" — that is, without brains — gives us the cue to the weak part she bears in the story. Ophelia is not intellectually strong. Throughout the play she never knows what she should think, never uses her own judgment, never acts upon her own initiative. In matters that vitally concern her, and — what to her should be more important — vitally concern the man whom she loves, she allows herself to be governed by the minds of others. As the dramatist makes her say (III, ii, 120): "I think nothing."

In view of Shakespeare's fixed custom of endowing his women with brains and will-power, his failure to give these qualities to Ophelia is striking. Recall, for instance, Beatrice, who was more than a match for Benedick; or Rosalind, who guided the whole plot; or Juliet, upon whom Romeo entirely relied for advice and aid; or Lady Macbeth, who furnished both brains and will to her husband; or Portia, who had a shrewder intellect than all the men in the play put together. But with Ophelia it is otherwise. In the large gallery of Shakespeare's heroines she stands alone — unable to think or act for herself, and flatly called by her father "a baby."

Why the dramatist should thus represent her, however, is readily understood. He is engaged in the task of disillusioning the hero. And for this purpose he uses the two women whom Hamlet loved — his mother, and his sweetheart. Both of them Hamlet had idealized; concerning both he is painfully disillusioned. Of one he was impelled to exclaim: "O most pernicious woman!"; of the other: brief "as woman's love." We should bear in mind that Shakespeare

is creating a tragedy. And one of the most tragic things in the play is that the woman whom Hamlet so deeply loves proves wanting in his hour of trial. She not only fails to help him, but actually sides with those who are seeking to entrap him. What Hamlet needs in his terrible struggle with life is the aid of a wise and strong being, like Portia, upon whom he can rely, to whom he can go with his troubles, from whom he can receive comfort and strength. Above all, he needs one who can restore his faith in womanhood, and thus renew his confidence in human nature. Yet these are the very things that Shakespeare denies him.

Polonius' attack leaves Hamlet no shred of respectability. The young Prince, so obviously "noble" in every fiber of his character, is denounced as an evil tempter, seeking like a pious and sanctified bawd to "beguile" a trustful young girl of her chastity. And in view of the supposedly treacherous purpose of his attentions to Ophelia, Polonius orders her not to "slander" a moment's leisure by giving "words or talk" with this "explorator of unholy suits." In response Ophelia meekly says: "I shall obey, my lord." And she does. She refuses to see Hamlet when he calls; she "repels" his letters unopened; at the end of two months, so she tells us, she has not spoken a single word with him. And she treats him in this heartless manner without offering the slightest explanation. She is obedient to her father, but not loyal to the man she loves.

Now that we have met Ophelia, and have been duly informed as to her nature, the introductory portion of the play is over, and we are ready for the story to take its course. Hence, in the next scene the Ghost reveals its great secret, issues its orders, and the plot at last gets under way.

Act I, Scene iv

Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus are on the platform at midnight, awaiting the "dreaded sight" now due to appear at any moment. Naturally they are nervous; and quite as naturally they attempt to make conversation on such trivial subjects as the weather and the time. After a silence, which finally becomes painful, Hamlet observes: "The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold"; Horatio briefly replies: "It is a nipping and an eager air." Another pause. Then Hamlet, obviously the most nervous of the three, says: "What hour now?" Horatio: "I think it lacks of twelve"; the soldier Marcellus, for the first time interrupting his superiors, corrects: "No, it is struck." Another pause follows, trying to all. At last the silence is relieved by a burst of loud revelry from within the palace — the roll of kettle-drums, the blare of trumpets, and the boom of cannon. This starts Hamlet upon the topic of drinking in Denmark. Horatio and Marcellus are quiet; indeed, they hardly hear what their friend is saying, for their minds are occupied with the imminent visit of the Ghost, already overdue. Hamlet, thus uninterrupted, launches upon a sentence remarkable for its length, its rambling structure, and its seemingly endless piling up of modifying clauses — in these respects one of the most extraordinary sentences in Shakespeare. So long, intricate, and involved it is, that modern scholars have spent much time and ingenuity in efforts to render it clear and even terse. Yet its rambling nature, we may suspect, was deliberately planned by the artist to reflect the nervous abstraction of the speaker. Hamlet is not really interested in what he is saying; his mind is tense upon the visitation by his father's spirit, and hence his sentence grows more and more involved. Further, Shakespeare, we may suppose, does not wish the attention of the audience to be drawn away from the present situation to the unrelated subject of intemperance, but rather to be held in a state of

anxious expectation of the coming specter. Accordingly, if we are to preserve the effects designed by the artist, we must let the sentence stand as he wrote it, long, involved, obscure — and, above all, unfinished. Hamlet is in the midst of his rambling utterance when Horatio, seizing him by the arm, whispers: "Look, my lord! it comes!" The entrance of the Ghost, and nothing else, could put an end to that sentence.

As the Ghost slowly advances, Hamlet, stepping forward, addresses it, not, as did Horatio and as prescribed by rule, in a formal conjuration, but in terms of intimate, affectionate appeal:

> I'll call thee "Hamlet,"
> "King," "Father." — Royal Dane, O answer me!

Instead of answering, the Ghost, with "courteous action," beckons to him, indicating that it would speak to him in private. The revelation it has to make concerning the sins of his mother is, we realize, unfit for the ear of strangers. And thus the scene closes with Hamlet being led off the stage by his father's spirit.

Act I, Scene v

Scene v, continuing the preceding scene, presents to us the confidential interview between father and son.

When the Ghost, at the beginning of its communication, casually alludes to the "tormenting flames" to which it must soon yield itself, Hamlet, overcome by pity, murmurs: "Alas! poor Ghost!" But the Ghost impatiently cuts him short: "Pity me not!" It is no time for pity; the occasion demands *action*, and *swift* action. "Speak," says Hamlet: "I am bound to hear." And again the Ghost, impatient at mere words, stresses the necessity of action: "So art thou to revenge!"

Yet some persons, in their attempts to explain why Hamlet delayed in his task, say that Shakespeare desired to represent the principle of taking justice into one's own hands as morally wrong, and hence makes Hamlet averse to the idea of revenge. That theory, however, the implication of the whole play denies. Shakespeare lays heavy emphasis on the binding nature of revenge; it is a duty, a sacred obligation. He even makes us feel resentment at the hero for being dilatory in performing the "important acting." Nowhere does he even faintly suggest that Hamlet ought *not* to take revenge. The notion that it was morally wrong for a son to avenge his father's murder — especially a murder committed under such circumstances as represented in the play — was not entertained in Hamlet's time. On the contrary, revenge was believed to be necessary to the eternal rest of the murdered one, whose spirit was doomed to a painful existence until the crime was revealed and adequately punished. And hence it was held that revenge for a murdered father was solemnly binding upon the son — especially an only son. We must be careful not to import into the play modern conceptions of ethical propriety. To the people of his own time, and even to the audience of the Elizabethan age, Hamlet was called upon to perform a "dread" [= sacred] duty. Though in the course of the play he doubted many things, he never doubted the righteousness of the task his father had placed upon his shoulders. We may, therefore, at the beginning of our study discard this hypothesis as failing to square with the text.

At line 22, the Ghost shifts the emphasis. Having first demanded revenge as an unquestionable *right*, it now adds the appeal of affection: "If thou didst ever thy dear father *love*!" The helpless father, unable to act in his own behalf, begs his only son for aid. And he pleads from such poignant distress that Hamlet, overcome with pity, groans aloud: "O God!"

When, at the conclusion of its moving appeal, the Ghost lets slip the word "murder," Hamlet's pity instantly changes to astonishment: "Murder!" he exclaims. The news takes him completely by surprise. He had not hitherto suspected that his father had been the victim of an assassin, and hence is entirely unprepared for the disclosure. The Ghost reaffirms its statement; whereupon Hamlet, demanding specific details at once, shouts:

> Haste me to know't! that I, with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love,
> May sweep to my revenge!

Observe that there is not the slightest hesitation on his part. "Haste" is the thing emphasized. And the image employed is that of a bird of prey swooping down upon its quarry. Hamlet exults in the speed with which he will act. He is all eagerness to be at his task. And here we see the normal Hamlet, the Hamlet who, according to Ophelia, wins fame on the battle-field, who leaps to attack the pirates, and who as a soldier commands the admiration of Fortinbras the man of energy. And now he is straining at the leash, impatient to be in action.

The Ghost is pleased: "I find thee apt"; yet it takes Hamlet's violent and instant reaction as a matter of course, for —

> duller should'st thou be than the fat weed
> That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf
> Would'st thou not stir in this!

These lines clearly express the attitude toward the imposed task which Shakespeare makes us hold throughout the entire play. We demand that the hero in righteous anger sweep to his revenge, and we are provoked at him for his slowness. To us, as to the Ghost and to Hamlet, the act appears as an imperative duty.

Having now established revenge as absolutely binding

upon Hamlet, Shakespeare next turns to revealing the details of the murder: "Now, Hamlet, hear!" The revelation falls into two parts; that is, it has to do with two crimes, and relates to two persons. The first bit of news is that the elder King Hamlet had been secretly murdered by his brother Claudius. At the bare mention of the name "Claudius," Hamlet shouts: "O, my prophetic soul!" Yet instantly he asks for verification: "My uncle?" We must not suppose that throughout the two months that have elapsed since the death of his father Hamlet has suspected Claudius of this crime. It is clear that the news of murder comes as a shock to him. But on the morning of this very day, when Horatio and the sentinels informed him that the Ghost was walking, he drew the natural inference that some "foul deed" serious enough to cause his father great distress must have been committed. Exactly what deed, of course, he did not know. But in contemplating the matter throughout the long day he had come to suspect that, whatever it was, his uncle probably had a hand in it. To that extent alone had his soul been "prophetic."

The news of the murder constitutes the first part of the Ghost's revelation. It is startling enough. But if that were all the Ghost had to tell, there would have been no tragedy. Hamlet would have "swept" to his revenge at once, and the play would have come to an end in the First Act. The Ghost, however, has further news to impart, even more startling — news about Hamlet's mother. She had been merely a "seeming-virtuous" woman. Before the death of her husband, she had been "seduced" by her brother-in-law, and had given over her body to "shameful lust." She was guilty both of adultery and incest; and for some time before the murder she had been thus "preying on garbage." It is the old story, so common in criminal annals, of an unlawful passion leading to the murder of the husband. Yet in its details this murder was far more repulsive than the average:

Murder, most foul at best,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.

It was "foul" because inspired by the foulest of motives — the motives of lust and ambition; "strange" because of the close kinship of the perpetrator; and "unnatural" because it involved incest between brother and sister-in-law.

To Hamlet this revelation concerning the character of his mother must have come as a terrible blow. Merely her unseemly haste in remarrying had plunged him into a state of deep melancholia. But her haste in remarrying was as nothing compared to her incestuous adultery with her husband's younger brother. Nor was that all. The horror in Hamlet's mind was increased by his jumping to the conclusion that his mother shared with Claudius the blood-guilt, that she had plotted with her paramour the death of her unsuspecting husband, and thus was, by connivance at least, a murderess.

The inference was natural. And that Hamlet believed it is clear from the subsequent scenes. For instance, in the play he wrote to be acted before the guilty couple presenting their crime as he understood it, he makes the Player-Queen say:

None wed the second but who killed the first;

and, with his eyes riveted to his mother's face, he murmurs: "Wormwood, wormwood!" Again he makes the Player-Queen say:

A second time I kill my husband dead;

and he grimly asks: "Madam, how like you this play?" Still again, when he stabs Polonius behind the curtain, and Gertrude exclaims, "O what a rash and bloody deed is this!" quick as a flash he retorts:

Hamlet. A bloody deed! Almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king and marry with his brother!

Gertrude. As kill a king?
Hamlet. Ay, lady, 'twas my word!

And other evidence, if necessary, could be added.

Unquestionably, then, Hamlet *thinks* his mother part-guilty in the murder. But did Gertrude really have a share in that crime? The Ghost does not actually say so; and her astonished reply to Hamlet's accusation, as quoted above, shows her innocence. Thereafter Hamlet abandons the thought. But now he fully believes her guilty of the murder; and the effect upon him, therefore, is just as great as if it were really true.

How utterly crushed he is by these terrible revelations concerning his mother is shown by his silence. Until the Ghost began to speak of Gertrude's sins, he was full of energy, constantly interrupting, and quick to respond to his father's every utterance. Now, however, he is too overcome to speak a single word. Even the Ghost's description of the awful sufferings to which it must soon yield itself, ending up with the agonizing cry, "O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!" brings from Hamlet no expression of pity, as before a much feebler description did. Nor do his father's stirring appeals to him to take revenge — "If thou hast nature in thee, bear it not!" — evoke from him the slightest murmur. At first he had reacted with vigor: "Haste me to know't, that I," etc. Now he is silent. Nothing arouses him; he is too stupefied to think. That is why only the Ghost speaks.

One particular order his father gives him:

> But, howsoever thou pursuest this act,
> Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive
> Against thy mother aught.

Hamlet needs this command, for the provocation for him to punish her along with Claudius is great. In the Third Act we actually find him in a savage, almost bloodthirsty mood

toward his mother, only with difficulty holding himself back from killing her: "Let not the soul of Nero," he has to warn himself, "enter this firm bosom."

At last the approaching light of dawn drives the Ghost away. To his father's affectionate farewells, several times repeated, Hamlet makes no response; indeed, he has not spoken a single word since first he heard of his mother's shameful conduct. With a final appeal, "Hamlet, remember me!" — which also evokes no response — the Ghost slowly sinks beneath the stage.

For a long while Hamlet stands dazed. Then, through sheer weakness, his knees give way, and he sinks to the floor. The attitude of prayer in which he thus finds himself causes in his distracted mind a queer reaction. He raises his eyes to heaven: "O, all you host of heaven!"; then, gazing stupefied at things about him: "O earth!"; and as his head wearily sinks forward until his eyes look downward, he adds: "What else? and shall I couple hell?" He rouses himself: "O fie!" His thoughts were indeed foolish.

His mind turns back to the news delivered by the Ghost. "Hold, hold, my heart!" he murmurs: hold from breaking. What news had the Ghost delivered which might cause Hamlet's heart to break? Not the news about Claudius; as a soldier Hamlet could take care of that. Surely it was the news about his mother — "O most pernicious woman!" — a shameful secret that he must keep locked up within.

With the words "And you, my sinews, grow not instant old," he rises with effort to his feet. Pressing his hand to his forehead, he tries to steady this thoughts. The experience he had just gone through was very distressing and exhausting; therefore we must expect the inevitable reaction. It comes in his more or less silly conduct of plucking out his memorandum-book and writing therein. And, when a moment later he hears his companions approaching, it breaks into

actual hilarity as he half-sings the hunter's well-known cry to the falcon:

> Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird! Come!

When his friends enter, he shakes them foolishly by the hand, pump-handle fashion, and utters so much nonsense that Horatio, in astonishment, checks him:

> These are but wild and whirling words, my lord!

So they were. Hamlet's conduct was silly, and had been so since he plucked out his notebook and began to write. Yet the explanation of his behavior is simple: it was reaction from the tension of the interview with the Ghost.

At last having secured the needed relief, he becomes serious. He briefly informs his companions that the Ghost was, most certainly, not an evil spirit, as they formerly had suggested it might be, but "an honest Ghost, that let me tell you!" And, with finality, he adds that he will not reveal to them the message the Ghost had imparted to him. How could he reveal the "shameful lust" of his mother, or the "foul murder" in which, as he thinks, she was involved?

Finally, with an appeal to their mutual love, he asks them under no circumstances to mention what they have seen. Not content with their solemn promise, he insists upon their swearing on his sword — the symbol of the cross. The reason for his extraordinary caution is embodied in the oath he frames, requiring of them silence —

> How strange or odd soe'er I bear myself,
> As I, perchance, hereafter shall think meet
> To put an antic disposition on.

Already he plans to act the madman. "Hereafter," he tells us, he will "put an antic disposition on." When, therefore, in the following scenes we see him putting on this antic disposition, behaving in a manner "how strange or odd

soe'er," it would surely be foolish for us to say he actually was mad. Shakespeare has done what he could to prevent this fallacy; and a careful examination of the text throughout shows that the hypothesis of real insanity is untenable. Nor should we need to look at the text to discover this truth, for without being told we should know that the doings of a madman can have no tragic value. In the insane asylums there are thousands of mad persons; their antic behavior may be comic, their condition may be pathetic, but their actions can hardly be tragic. For the purpose of tragedy an agent must make choices, commit errors, and exhibit feelings and conduct with which we can readily identify ourselves. It is inconceivable that Shakespeare spends his time, and ours, in portraying a man who is deprived of his mental faculties. Melancholy, to be sure, Hamlet is; but, although that state of emotional suffering colors his thinking and affects his will-power, it does not interfere with his full consciousness, and hence does not prevent our full sympathy.

Why did Hamlet plan to act the madman? We can only guess. His task seemed to call for a stratagem of some kind; the Ghost may have had such in mind when it said "Howsoever thou pursuest this act." And possibly the stratagem of pretended insanity was suggested to Hamlet by his antic behavior toward his friends, and the remarkable effect it produced upon them. Here, at least, was a definite plan that offered certain obvious advantages.

Hamlet's later failure to use it to accomplish the great deed, as, presumably, he originally intended, arose from causes entirely beyond his control. And Shakespeare at once begins to show us precisely what it was that rendered the hero unable to act. Immediately after announcing his definite plan, Hamlet is overcome by an utter sickness of soul that makes all effort impossible to him. In an aside he wearily complains:

> The time is out of joint. O cursed spite
> That ever I was born, to set it right.

The stress falls upon the phrase "that ever I was born" — revealing *tedium vitae*. In other words, he is again sinking into melancholia; and with melancholia comes that "general condition of depression, inaction, and impotence," in which the patient is incapable of "deciding on, or of making an effort" (Régis). Within a few moments after assuming his task Hamlet feels unable to summon the energy needed to carry that task into execution.

And with this aside — a soliloquy in miniature — tying up with the earlier soliloquy, both revealing melancholia in the hero, Shakespeare brings the First Act to a close.

It will repay us to glance back over this First Act in order to note the author's plan, and observe where he has placed the emphasis. The first three scenes were devoted to formal introduction. The exposition, naturally, centered on the hero, whose strange behavior is to constitute the main interest of the play. In the initial revelation of Hamlet's state of mind — accomplished by means of a soliloquy — the emphasis fell upon the fact that already he was in a condition of melancholia. And the cause of that melancholia was shown to be one thing only — disillusionment as to his mother's character.

Then, with the appearance of the Ghost to Hamlet, the plot was set in motion. The purpose of a plot in tragedy is to crush the hero. There must be dealt to him some great blow which will shatter his being, produce in him intense suffering, and ultimately cause him to die the death. With the coming of the Ghost what great blow has been dealt to Hamlet? What revelation made, adequate in force and kind to crush his soul and explain his strange condition of moping and inertia throughout the rest of the play? Clearly just one thing — the revelation that his mother, whom he

had idolized, had been merely a "seeming-virtuous" woman, was, in reality, an adulteress and, as he thought, a murderess. This news was made the climax of the First Act. It was such a climax that it well nigh obliterates in our minds the earlier horror at Gertrude's haste in remarrying. We almost forget that bit of unnatural conduct. Yet that by itself had been enough to plunge Hamlet into a state of melancholia so deep as to make him contemplate suicide. Now, however, that unseemly behavior of hers fades into the background, takes its place as merely a part of the introductory material, while her far more odious conduct — involving foul crimes — stands out in bold emphasis, disclosing for the first time her real nature.

The effect of this crushing news upon the already melancholy Hamlet should be quickly apparent. It was immediately apparent in his stupefaction, his silence, his dazed condition following the Ghost's revelation; it was apparent in his confused thinking and incoherent utterances after the Ghost departed; and it broke out again, as he left the stage, in the weary aside: "That ever I was born!" If he was, at once, so profoundly affected by this news, we can readily understand that as he broods over it he will be swept into the depth of melancholic depression. And melancholia, as is its nature, will produce in him that "John-a-dreams" condition, that lack of energy, which constitutes the main feature of the play.

Thus the First Act was skillfully planned and executed. Neither its emphasis nor its climax should leave us in doubt as to the dramatist's purpose.

ACT II

Act II opens after a lapse of several weeks. Laertes, in days when travel into foreign countries was slow, had reached Paris, had spent his money, and had sent back to

his father for fresh supplies. Cornelius and Voltimand had made their journey to Norway; the King of Norway, after having duly "looked into" the complaint of the Danish ruler regarding the activities of Fortinbras, had "suppressed his nephew's levies"; and the ambassadors, fully satisfied in every detail, had returned to Elsinore. Claudius, gradually becoming more suspicious of Hamlet's feigned madness, had finally sent to Wittenberg to summon the Prince's fellow-students, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the two young men had arrived at Court. All these incidents suggest the passage of considerable time. But Shakespeare does not leave us guessing; he states the exact number of weeks that have elapsed. Hamlet, in his first soliloquy (I, II, 138), informed us that his father had been "two months dead"; Ophelia now tells us that the elder king had been "twice two months" dead. Hence, since Act I, when the Ghost made its pitiful appeal, two full months have passed.

During these two months what had Hamlet done? Nothing, save to "put an antic disposition on." He had said to Horatio and Marcellus that he would play the madman; and he had now for eight weeks been feigning insanity, with only three poor results: he had distressed his mother, who lived almost by his looks; he had puzzled old Polonius, whose wits were mainly lacking; and he had aroused the sinister suspicion of Claudius, who alone could guess what might explain the strange behavior of the young Prince.

Exactly how did Hamlet behave in order to produce an "antic" effect? He feigned, to be sure, a certain disjointed quality in his utterance, weakened, however, by too much pointed sarcasm ("Though this be madness," says Polonius, "yet there is method in't"; "What he spake," says Claudius, "though it lack'd form a little, was not like madness"), and he occasionally may have acted in a silly way. But the most startling evidence of lunacy that he gave was in his costume. Though, we are told, he had ever been in matters of dress

"the glass" — a sort of fashion-plate to be observed by all observers, suddenly he became just the opposite — unkempt, even "foul" in parts of his costume. His uncle, as all the rest of those who formerly knew him, was greatly astonished at the change, and described it as nothing less than a "transformation":

> Since nor the *exterior*, nor the inward man,
> Resembles that it was.

Ophelia, too, was profoundly struck by this "transformation" of his "exterior." When Hamlet quietly entered her private room (she had hitherto refused to see him), she was so startled by his change in appearance that she fled to her father:

> *Ophelia.* O my lord! my lord! I have been so affrighted!
> *Polonius.* With what, in the name of God?
> *Ophelia.* My lord! as I was sewing in my closet,
> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
> No hat upon his head, his stockings foul'd,
> Ungartered, and down gyved to his ankle . . .

This slovenliness in costume has usually been interpreted as the pose of the forlorn lover. It is true that literary artists of the seventeenth century sometimes represented a disappointed lover as adopting a melancholy pose accompanied by a certain carelessness in dress. But Hamlet's physical appearance cannot be explained on this score. He has "no hat upon his head"; the sad lover is invariably represented with his hat plucked low over his eyes. Hamlet's doublet is "all" — that is, entirely — unfastened, a most indelicate form of dishabille. His stockings are down-fallen to his ankles; since men's stockings reached to or above the knee, Hamlet was thus barelegged. And the stockings are actually "fouled," which takes away the fine sentimentality of the lover-pose. Most significant of all, perhaps, is the allusion to his shirt. This part of a man's costume was not sup-

posed to be visible; yet Hamlet appears in public in his shirt; it is almost as though, as we should say to-day, he appeared in his undershirt. None of these things can be explained on the score of the sentimental, lovesick youth; the correct picture of that well-known and always amusing type Shakespeare gives us in the Romeo who thought himself enamoured of the black-eyed Rosaline. It need hardly be added that long before Hamlet's visit to Ophelia, Claudius was suspicious because of the Prince's unusual "transformation" in "exterior"; or that Hamlet's display of emotion in Ophelia's closet was too obviously sincere to be interpreted as the mere affectation of a conventional pose.[1]

But Hamlet's slovenly and foul dress is what one should expect from a "natural," or idiot; and as such it is in perfect keeping with his announced plan of putting on an "antic" disposition. It must have impressed the audience as much as it did Claudius or Ophelia. And evidence that it did make a deep impression on the Elizabethan play-goer is not lacking. In 1604, Anthony Scoloker, who calls himself a friend of Shakespeare, and who tells us that he had seen the tragedy of *Hamlet* acted (adding that it "pleased all"), published a long poem entitled *Diaphantus*, in the course of which the hero goes mad. With the performance of *Hamlet* fresh in his mind, and, as he knew, in the minds of his readers, the author describes the madness of his hero thus:

> Puts off his clothes, his shirt he only wears,
> Much like mad Hamlet.

And an anonymous dramatist in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (*c.* 1607), inspired by *Hamlet*, and assuming throughout a common knowledge of Shakespeare's play, writes:

> Surely we are all mad people, and they
> Whom we think mad are not: we mistake those;
> 'Tis we are mad in sense, they *but in clothes.*

[1] If the reader desires further proof, he may consult the Appendix under "Belleforest."

So Hamlet's "madness," as it impressed the audience of the Globe, was conspicuously a madness "in clothes." The modern stage, however, fails to employ this startling transformation of the "exterior"; the actor represents the young Prince from beginning to end as tastefully dressed in black velvet — still, though "mad," the glass of fashion.

But more important than *how* Hamlet put on his antic disposition is *why* he delayed in performing his great task. What, one demands, has become of his promise to his father that he would "sweep" to his revenge? After two full months he has failed not only to accomplish his announced purpose, but even to make a start. When, on the following night, his father's spirit reappears to him, Hamlet asks: "What would your gracious figure?" Yet he does not wait for a reply; he knows, only too well, why his father should revisit him, and he answers the question himself:

> Do you not come your *tardy* son to *chide*,
> That, laps'd in time and passion, lets go by
> The *important* acting of your *dread* command?

In this passage of self-condemnation, Hamlet admits that there was need of haste ("the *important* acting"); admits that his delay was unjustified ("your *tardy* son"); admits that his obligation was sacred ("your *dread* command"); and admits that his prolonged inaction fully warranted a return of his father from the other world to chide him.

Why, then, had he, during two long months, "let go by" the acting of a task so "important," the performance of a command so "dread"? A good dramatic artist would have prepared us to answer that question. Shakespeare, we may take it, was a good dramatic artist. And since in the previous scenes he had put himself to no little trouble to reveal Hamlet as in a state of melancholia, we may logically infer that melancholia will explain Hamlet's being "laps'd in time and passion" — lost in moody thought, unable to act.

For our answer, therefore, let us look whither Shakespeare has pointed.

The cause of Hamlet's initial melancholia, we saw, was disillusionment regarding his mother's character; her haste in remarrying, arguing insincerity and sensuality, had made him so weary of life that he contemplated suicide. Now it is obvious that an aggravation of the cause would produce more serious results; and it is equally obvious that such aggravation came in the Ghost's disclosure of the full measure of Gertrude's sin. We may well believe that the new and horrible facts concerning his mother's character would plunge Hamlet into the very depths of melancholia.

What, then, are the effects of deep melancholia upon the sufferer? Some of the more superficial symptoms we have already noted; but the two *fundamental* effects, naturally of chief importance for an understanding of the play, remain to be considered. The first is technically known as "an-energy," or "paralysis of the will-power." That is, the melancholic person is rendered incapable of putting forth the sustained effort necessary to the accomplishment of a difficult task, with the result that he becomes, in the words of Hamlet, "lapsed in time." All of us, in our mild attacks of melancholia, have experienced this paralysis of energy, during which we have found it difficult if not impossible to address ourselves to any labor demanding effort. With profound melancholia paralysis of will-power becomes virtually complete. However much the melancholic person may realize the importance of a specific task, and however much in his heart he may desire to accomplish it, he is unable to summon up the needful energy. He may, and usually does, say with his lips that he "will" do it; but he cannot convert resolution into action.

All authorities on melancholia agree that paralysis of will-power is the *fundamental* characteristic of this mental affection. Krafft-Ebing, for instance, writes: "The fundamental

character of melancholia is the absence of energy"; and he adds: "The inhibited activity finds expression in the complaints of the patient that he would *like* to act, but that he cannot *will* himself to act." "It is possible that in these cases there is virtually a very lively will [= desire to act], but its expression is impossible. . . . The patient (in whom one sees how painful this inhibited state of psychic tension is) makes every effort to carry out the desired movement, but he does not succeed, or only imperfectly, in performing it." We may again quote Régis's formal definition of simple melancholia: "The whole is comprised in, or limited to, a general condition of depression, inaction, and impotence. The patients avoid all labor, all occupation; they isolate themselves, . . . incapable of wishing, or deciding on, or of making an effort. This is simple melancholic depression."

Now, in the light of this "fundamental" characteristic of melancholia, let us examine Hamlet's case. His task involved, if no great personal danger to himself, at least grave problems that demanded care and sustained effort. He was called upon to kill the ruling sovereign of his country, a king strongly entrenched in Court favor, and, worse still, his own uncle. To the world the deed would seem to be a coarse and unnatural murder, inspired merely by ambition for the crown. Nor could he easily prove the contrary. From his dying utterances we learn how sensitive he was to the world's opinion, and how much he desired to keep his "fair name ungored." The killing of his uncle, therefore, must first be carried out with safety to himself, and then at once justified to a partisan Court and to the whole people of Denmark. That task, difficult enough in itself, was rendered more difficult by his obligation to keep his mother from being implicated in the exposures that necessarily would follow. His father had specially urged him to proceed in such a way — "howsoever thou pursuest this act" — as not

to involve her in the scandal. All these things, we may suppose, the normal Hamlet could have accomplished; but in his present condition they required more energy than his enfeebled will-power allowed.

Thus "the fundamental characteristic" of melancholia — paralysis of will-power — explains why Hamlet failed to "sweep" to his revenge. It explains also why the whole play becomes, as it is often described by commentators, "a play of inaction."

But there is a second important characteristic of melancholia, almost equally significant for an understanding of Hamlet: the intellectual centers of a melancholic person, however much the will-power may be paralyzed, are by no means inhibited. The brain, indeed, is stimulated to excessive activity; it works continuously, and, as it were, at white heat. The latest psychological theory actually conceives of melancholia as "a feverish condition of the mind." Furthermore, as the word "fever" suggests, this activity is morbid; for the brain dwells *only on painful topics*, brooding over them with a fixedness that produces weariness of life, disgust with human nature, and even the suicidal impulse. Our own limited experience with melancholia will verify this fact. Krafft-Ebing writes: "The content of the melancholic consciousness is psychic pain, distress, and depression. The mind is incapable of calling up any other than painful thoughts." And Régis defines melancholia as "a concentration of the mind on sad ideas."

Now let us apply this second important characteristic to Hamlet. On what "painful" topic would his mind dwell? Here the dramatist has not left us in doubt: Hamlet's mind would brood over the conduct of his mother ("Heaven and Earth, must I remember?"; "Let me not think on't!"; "O most pernicious woman!"). Two correlated results inevitably would follow: his constant meditation on this painful topic would keep him in a state of melancholia; and mel-

ancholia, paralyzing his will-power, would hold him fast in helpless inactivity.

Yet upon this helpless being is laid an important task demanding both speed and energy. His intellect — the functioning of which, aside from a morbid coloring, is unimpaired — clearly tells him that by every principle of honor he ought at once to avenge the foul murder of his father, the seduction of his mother, and the treacherous theft of the throne; it tells him, also, that by every obligation of affection he ought to give rest to the perturbed spirit of one whom he dearly loved. As Goethe, with the peculiar insight of a poet, noted, "every duty was sacred to him"; this duty is doubly sacred to him through the demands of both honor and affection. And he longs with all his heart to do his clearly realized duty. Yet, to his astonishment, he finds himself unable to put forth the slightest effort toward its accomplishment.

It is the realization of what he should do, and *do promptly*, combined with the realization of his complete failure even to make a start, that produces in his mind such deep anguish. How deep his suffering is we see in the bitter self-denunciation that breaks out in his soliloquies. At times this suffering becomes unendurable; and then he is driven to manufacture excuses for his inactivity, for his soul demands some form of relief from its agony.

During the past two months he had found such relief by pretending to his soul that simulating madness was a definite preparation for the deed. When he originally conceived the idea of putting "an antic disposition on," he probably thought that he could use insanity as a cloak under which to achieve his revenge. But after melancholia, swiftly closing down upon him, rendered him unable to stir, and his resultant mental suffering forced him to seek an excuse for his delay, he found an excuse ready at hand in his previously devised scheme of playing the madman. And hence he con-

tinued it, from day to day and week to week, deriving comfort in the thought that in this way he was somehow busied with the "important acting."

That his feigned insanity was prolonged merely as an excuse for his "monstrous" delay is clear from ample evidence. In the first place, his two months' continuation of antic behavior was not caused by lack of opportunity to kill his uncle, for he had such opportunity almost daily. He enjoyed free access to the King's presence — on one occasion he actually strolled into the royal bedchamber while Claudius was kneeling in prayer. And we should not fail to note that he never mentions the lack of opportunity; on the contrary, he bitterly accuses himself for not taking advantage of his unlimited opportunities. We hear him in one soliloquy complain in desperation: "Why this thing's to do, I do not know, since I have means [= opportunity] . . . and power to do it." In the second place, he made no serious attempt to convince others that he was mad; indeed, he seems hardly to have cared whether they thought him mad or not. Claudius was not deceived; he declared that, though Hamlet's behavior was "something like madness," it was not true madness. When the treacherous Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were, as Hamlet well knew, set to spy upon him, he made little effort to deceive them. To Polonius, bent on trapping him, he talked in such a way as to force even that "tedious old fool" to observe that there was too much method in the madness. No one was convinced that Hamlet was insane. That he could have made all these men think him mad, had he seriously attempted to deceive them, we cannot doubt; that he convinced none of them, and put forth no real or consistent effort to do so, is significant. In the third place, Hamlet did not try in the smallest way to make his madness help him. At the end of two months he is not a whit nearer doing the deed; and he frankly confesses that all this while he

had been merely "lapsed in time and passion." In the fourth place, his "insanity" was feigned so carelessly and for so long a time that it became exceedingly dangerous not only to his important task but even to his life. His uncle's deepest suspicions were aroused. Persons were set to spy on him. Polonius was trying to entrap him. At last Claudius began to lay plans to have him murdered. Ultimately, indeed, Hamlet's antic behavior cost him his life. Thus his long-continued madness was unnecessary to gain opportunity, was not carried out with a serious effort to deceive, was not made use of in the slightest way, and, finally, was the chief if not sole cause of his undoing. We can hardly believe that this represents the shrewd conduct of an intelligent person, such as Hamlet unquestionably was.

But we can readily understand how feigning insanity eased the mental suffering under which he labored. It supplied him with a surrogate form of *activity* — mental activity, of which alone he was capable. It offered, in its antic nature, a certain kind of humor which served as an antidote to his grief. It enabled him, as he directed his shafts at Claudius, at Gertrude, at Polonius, to give utterance to his pent-up feelings, and thus find, as it were, a safety-valve for his emotions. And, most important of all, it furnished his soul with the needed excuse that somehow this was a preparation for the big deed.

In this fashion he had for two months been drifting. If, however, the hero of the story indefinitely remains "lapsed in time," we cannot have a play; and hence the next task of the dramatist is to arouse Hamlet from his apathy. This can best be accomplished by rendering his feigned madness no longer serviceable to him as an excuse for delay. Then mental suffering, accumulating within, will drive the victim forward to action (as devising the Mouse-Trap), which, being ill-advised in kind, will swiftly pull destruction upon his head.

Act II, Scene i

Polonius is dispatching his man with a fresh supply of money to Laertes in Paris. In his elaborate instructions to this common servant he reveals the nature of his politic wisdom (plain spying), his enormous conceit, his fondness for talking, and his low moral standards. That Shakespeare is making fun of him is clearly shown, for instance in lines 49–51.

As the servant goes out, Ophelia rushes in greatly agitated. She has just seen Hamlet, and has observed in him — so she thinks — the effect of her harsh treatment of him. "Mad for thy love?" asks Polonius. "My lord, I do not know," she replies with characteristic inability to think, "but, truly, I do fear it." Indeed she has every reason to believe that his sad state arose from her cruel renunciation of him. They had been for a long time — even before the play opens — ardent lovers. The courtship, as we learn, had been carried on with the knowledge and sanction of Gertrude; possibly the Queen had been acting as a match-maker, for over the grave of Ophelia she said: "I hoped thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife; I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid." Under such auspices Hamlet had come to love Ophelia with all the intensity of his being; and Ophelia, in her innocent, trustful way, had fully yielded her heart to him. She had freely accepted from him "rich gifts," and "with them words of so sweet breath composed as made the things more rich." She had treasured up his passionate letters (of which a sample is later shown us) "in her excellent white bosom." And Hamlet, as was his nature, had idealized her — in that typical letter of his, written possibly from Wittenberg, he apostrophizes her as "Best, O Most Best!" To him she was heavenly-perfect, "celestial"; and he completely worshiped her as his "soul's idol." After the death of his father he had sought comfort in her love (note the twice-repeated "of

late" in reference to his many visits), and was so constantly with her that gossip "in way of caution" had come to both Laertes and Polonius. As the text puts it, he had "very oft, of late, given private time" to her; and she, in turn, had been "most free and bounteous" in receiving his visits. On these occasions he had ardently expressed his passion ("He hath, my lord, of late, made many tenders of his affection to me"), rendering eloquent his declarations of love with "almost all the holy vows of heaven"; and she, with every indication of reciprocated passion, had joyfully "suck'd the honey of his music vows."

Then, suddenly, and without a word of explanation, she began to treat him in a way that was not only harsh but even insulting. When, as "of late" he had been accustomed to do, he came with eagerness of heart to see her, she refused so to "slander any moment's leisure" as "to give words or talk with" him; and when, in hurt surprise, he addressed tender letters to her, she "repelled" these unopened. And for two months now she had continued her rude behavior.

How was Hamlet to understand this remarkable alteration in her attitude to him? Perhaps for a time he thought she was actuated by the report that his faculties had become impaired. Yet this explanation could not long satisfy him. Even if she believed that he was touched in his wits, there was no reason for her to treat him with cruel scorn, curtly refusing to see him, and repelling his letters. Had she no pity for him in his misfortune? Was her nature, like that of his mother, shallow and insincere? Was she heartlessly casting him aside the moment she discovered that he no longer was a good match for her? Was there another man in the case influencing her conduct? Naturally his melancholy mind would brood over her suddenly altered treatment of him, and would interpret it in the worst light — for that is the invariable tendency in melancholia.

At last, filled with painful suspicions, and overcome with

wounded love, he made a determined effort to see her. Denied admission at the door, he forced his way into her presence, and found her sitting quietly, sewing in her closet. Silently, but with "a look so piteous in purport as if he had been loosed out of hell," he stood before her. He took her by the wrist, and going to the length of all his arm, fixed her with intent, questioning gaze. Was he thus mutely asking for an explanation? Did he look for some evidence of love, some indication of old affection? If so, he received none. She shrank from his grasp, and kept her lips tightly closed, as ordered by her father. Hamlet gave her ample opportunity to reveal her true sentiment toward him — "Long stay'd he so," waiting, with misery expressed in his eyes "as if he had been loosed out of hell." Yet he found nothing in her face or in her manner to reassure him. Her stolid silence seemed to confirm his worst fears. And so, at last, he gave "a sigh so piteous and profound that it did seem to shatter all his bulk," and slowly, with lingering, appealing gaze, moved away, his eyes, to the last, bending their light upon her.

The scene is commonly referred to as "Hamlet's renunciation of Ophelia"; it should rather be called "Hamlet's disillusionment as to Ophelia." That he did not cease to love her is shown by the rest of the play. But now he has discovered — so he thinks — that she is shallow in nature, insincere in love, and unworthy of the affection he had lavished on her. And though he cannot cease to love her, he must believe her a second Gertrude: "Why she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on; yet . . . Let me not think on't! Frailty, thy name is woman." Thus another blow has fallen on the young idealist to intensify his suffering and plunge him still lower into the abyss of melancholia.

When Polonius discovers that the Prince had been truly in love, he curses his bad luck in that unwittingly he had

spoiled for his daughter so excellent a match. Yet, not to lose everything, he resolves to win favor with Claudius by disclosing, what Claudius is so eager to learn, the "very cause" of Hamlet's strange behavior; and seizing Ophelia by the hand, he hurriedly drags her off the stage: "Come, go we to the King."

Act II, Scene II

The suspicions of Claudius had been so thoroughly aroused by Hamlet's careless feigning of insanity that he had sent to the University of Wittenberg for the Prince's most intimate comrades, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in order that they, under the cloak of affection, might spy upon their friend. When they enter, Claudius, as was his custom, fulsomely smiles on them: "Moreover, that we much did long to see you"; but he needs no great effort to bend them to his evil purpose. He virtually asks them to betray the confidence of their best friend, pointing out to them how easily they, "being of so young days brought up with him, and since so neighbored to his youth and humor," can worm their way into his heart and discover his secret. The Queen adds:

> Good gentlemen, he has much talk'd of you;
> And sure I am two men there are not living
> To whom he more adheres.

We have no reason to doubt Gertrude's statement that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are the "two men" whom Hamlet most deeply loved. And what sort of young men are they? Of very noble families, no doubt (from childhood they had been "brought up" with the heir-apparent to the throne), excellent dressers, witty in conversation, and "of great showing" in all parts that denominate a gentleman; but in character they are weak. They readily agree to spy upon their friend, merely in order to win favor with

Claudius; they are, as Hamlet says, "sponges" that live only to "soak up the King's countenance, his rewards."

Perhaps we are tempted to wonder why Hamlet ever admitted them into his heart. A moment's reflection, however, tells us that we have here another instance of the hero's tragic flaw. Never suspecting evil in others, he accepted people at their apparent value, just as he had accepted his mother and Ophelia, and just as he accepted Laertes to the very end. The accidents of high birth and correspondence in years had made Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the companions of his boyhood; and subsequently they had been his most intimate friends in the care-free life of the university. Their apparent affection he returned with unquestioning soul, giving them in full measure the best love of which his nature was capable. His confidence in them, of course, does not mean that he lacked acumen, or was unable to penetrate character. It simply means that he lacked suspicion. Being himself "most generous and free from all contriving," he would never doubt the worth of his "good friends." But, once his suspicions were aroused, he could, and did, pierce to the very core of people's hearts.

As the treacherous pair go off to begin their espionage on Hamlet, Polonius enters all swollen up with the importance of bearing news. He says that the Ambassadors have returned from Norway, and that he can explain the "very cause of Hamlet's lunacy."

The Ambassadors, after making a favorable report of their business, are dismissed; whereupon Polonius, in his own peculiar, pompous way, begins to discuss Hamlet's madness. The speech is a masterpiece of garrulity. It contains, by way of preface, that oft-quoted jewel "Brevity is the soul of wit," then fails to exhibit the slightest symptom of brevity. As a grand climax the old fellow triumphantly produces a love-letter from Hamlet, typical of the many sent to Ophelia before the play begins, and possibly written

from Wittenberg. She, "in obedience," had turned over to the unsympathetic curiosity of her father all the confidential missives of her lover, intended only for her eyes; still more, she had retailed to him Hamlet's glowing expressions of love — "as they fell out, by time, by means, and place, *all* given to mine ear." How could she thus desecrate a passion so deep and tender?

Before unfolding the letter, Polonius reads the inscription on the outside. Its opening words, "To the Celestial, and my Soul's Idol," shows us Hamlet's absolute idealization of Ophelia, more fully revealed in the letter. In the midst of reading this eloquent inscription, Polonius suddenly halts, screws up his mouth, and, with conceit to be thought a nice judge of style, objects to the adjective "beautified," though it was in perfectly good usage in complimentary "addresses," especially of letters and dedications.

At last — taking his time, for he basks in his own importance — he unfolds the letter and reads the contents. Hamlet, in the conventional lover's manner, makes an attempt to express his affection in verse, but after a few lines impatiently breaks off with the exclamation: "O, dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers." Even the language of poetry could not reveal the depth of his passion: "I have not art to reckon my groans." And in a final burst of affection he declares: "That I love thee, Best, O Most Best, believe it!" The burden of the whole letter, it will be observed, is: "*Never* doubt I love." Yet that is exactly what Ophelia had done. The letter is thus rendered pathetic by the irony of the situation in which it is produced and read.

When Polonius finishes his long exposition of Hamlet's case, "declining" the Prince by successive steps "into the madness wherein now he raves," the King turns doubtfully to Gertrude: "Do you think 'tis this?" He has good reasons for thinking otherwise. Gertrude, too, has reasons for thinking otherwise; and hence she responds with hesitation:

"It may be — very likely." Polonius, annoyed by their obvious skepticism, offers his life in pawn for the correctness of his solution. Claudius, rather from a desire not to offend the old man than from any conviction, asks in a half-hearted way: "How may we try it further?" Instantly Polonius suggests eavesdropping — the only form of "wisdom" known to his "politic" mind. And seeing Hamlet approach, he resolves to set the snares at once.

Hurrying the King and Queen off the stage, he advances to the attack: "Do you know me, my lord?" Hamlet replies: "Excellent well. You are a — fishmonger." The appellation was then commonly used of a man who dealt in woman's virtue — a bawd. When Polonius indignantly replies, "Not I, my lord!" Hamlet retorts, "Then I would you were so *honest* a man," strongly emphasizing the word "honest" with its connotation "chaste."

Obviously some idea connected with chastity is in Hamlet's mind. And he immediately repeats it in clearer and more emphatic terms. Closing his book, he looks Polonius straight in the eye: "For, if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing-carrion — Have you a daughter?" We should now be on the alert, for Hamlet is going to speak about Ophelia. He still loves her; he had just visited her in her private chamber; and he has something upon his mind concerning her. And here is what he says: "Let her not walk i' the sun. Conception is a blessing — but not as your daughter may conceive. Friend, look to't!"

What does all this mean, beginning with "fishmonger" and ending with illegitimate child-bearing? Hamlet may talk wildly, but there is "method" in what he says. Moreover, he is here giving advice about the safety of Ophelia, whom he unquestionably still loves; he is speaking to her father; and what he says is a solemn warning delivered very seriously: "Friend, look to't!" Obviously Hamlet thought

that Polonius, stupid as he was, would understand. Let us, therefore, attempt to understand by looking at the passage through Hamlet's eyes.

The gist of the warning is: "Let her not walk i' the sun." The phrase "in the sun" was a common Elizabethan way of alluding to "the royal presence," "in the sunshine of kingly favor." Hamlet had already used it earlier in the play when to Claudius he said: "I am too much i' the sun." The warning, therefore, turned into simpler form, is: "Do not let Ophelia keep in the flattering company of Claudius." The description of Claudius, "the sun," as fond of carrion, means that he is lecherous. The Ghost had so described him, and Hamlet frequently applies to him the same epithet. The rest of the passage — that "the sun" corrupts what it kisses, and that Ophelia may conceive in a way that is not a blessing — needs no further elucidation.

Now we see how Hamlet's melancholy mind is explaining Ophelia's strange treatment of him: others are pulling the wires behind her conduct; as later he sarcastically says to her: "I could interpret between you and your love, if I could see the puppets dallying." For weeks he had been seeking to interpret her extraordinary behavior; and in his sickly brain, inclined to morbid suspicions, the idea had gradually taken shape that somehow behind her sudden renunciation of his love must be the villain Claudius (compare his "O my prophetic soul!"). As his mind dwelt upon this possibility, he began to fear that Claudius had foul designs upon the innocence of Ophelia. The "lecherous villain" had already "seduced" Gertrude; he might now be preparing to seduce Ophelia. Hamlet well knew that Claudius possessed in unusual measure the art of seduction — the "witchcraft of wit" in such matters, and the skill to use "rich gifts" to win women "to his shameful lust." By such shrewd means he had been able to corrupt even Hamlet's mother; he might more easily ensnare the young and guileless Ophelia. Per-

haps, too, Polonius was being used as a tool — willing to be a "fishmonger" of his daughter's virtue in order to advance her and himself.

The suspicion was, of course, the product of a sick, melancholy brain. It was cruelly unjust to Ophelia. Perhaps it explains the insulting nature of his remarks to her in the subsequent play-scene, otherwise hard to understand. And nó doubt it was a later realization of his error in judging her that accounts, in part at least, for his extraordinary display of anguish at her grave. Yet that he was at present obsessed with this foul suspicion can hardly be questioned. It appears again in the next scene when he urges her to seek refuge in a nunnery, the only place, he thought, where her chastity would be safe from her own weakness and the snares of Claudius.

Polonius does not understand the warning, for the simple reason that Hamlet's suspicion is entirely unfounded. And, not understanding, he continues to annoy the Prince until the latter, in self-defense, ridicules his physical appearance, and drives him off the stage in confusion. As he leaves, Hamlet sighs: "These tedious old fools!" — proof enough, if any were needed, of his perfect sanity.

The spirit of the whole scene changes with the sudden, and to Hamlet unexpected, entrance of his beloved friends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. As they rush forward to greet him, he is so delighted that he forgets all his present troubles in the joy of the meeting. With the shout, "My excellent good friends! How dost thou, Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz!" he throws his arms about them: "Good lads, how do you both?" His happiness at seeing them is unbounded. "What news?" he asks; how are things going at the university?

Thus again Shakespeare lifts the curtain for a moment in order to give us a glimpse of the Hamlet of former days — the boon-companion, the jolly good fellow. And, of course,

Shakespeare gives us these glimpses in order that we may compare the normal young Prince with the present abnormal being sunk in melancholic depression.

"What news?" asks Hamlet, his face glowing with good cheer. "None, my lord," responds Rosencrantz, "but that *the world's grown honest.*" That declaration comes like a knell to recall Hamlet to the present; in particular the word "honest" revives in his mind the theme of unchastity that had just been the subject of his talk with Ophelia's father — "would you were so *honest.*" Instantly his merriment fades; and — thinking of the world, of Polonius, of Ophelia, of Claudius, of Gertrude — he murmurs: "Your news is not true."

Now he is his melancholy self. And for the first time he is suspicious. He had not invited these young men to Elsinore. Their business is at the university. Why, then, are they here? He will find out: "Let me question more in particular." Hamlet, as we have said, is by nature an idealist; and as an idealist he always overestimates the worth of people. But the moment he becomes suspicious, and brings his keen intellect to bear on a case, he quickly penetrates to the bottom of any character.

Now he is to search out the character of his two erstwhile best friends, the men to whom, since boyhood, he had most adhered. And here there awaits him another tragic disillusionment.

He is very fair with them. He gives them every chance to be loyal to him, for he can hardly believe them unworthy of his affection. Instead, however, of responding to his generous overtures, they at once begin their espionage for Claudius. Rosencrantz takes the lead: "Why, then, your *ambition* makes it one; 'tis *too narrow* for your mind." Guildenstern, like a beagle, takes up the cry: "Which dreams, indeed, are *ambition.*" By such "drifts" they will find out whether Hamlet feigns madness through sinister

designs upon the throne of Claudius. As Hamlet says to them later: "Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?"

Still he cannot believe his comrades absolutely treacherous; and he appeals to the love that had always bound him and them together: "In the beaten way of friendship, what make you at Elsinore?" They glibly lie to him: "To visit you, my lord; no other occasion." Hamlet knows that to be a lie, and promptly rebukes it: "Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks; but, 'I thank you'; and sure, dear friends, my thanks are too dear a halfpenny."

In spite of growing fear, however, he refuses to accept what his mind only too clearly tells him. He makes it easier for them: "Were you not sent for? Is it your own inclining? Is it a free visitation?" The questions, thus framed, allow them a ready confession. When they hesitate, he pleads with them to be frank with him: "Come; come; deal justly with me!" And as they further hesitate he actually begs: "Come; come! — Nay, speak!" But instead of dealing justly with him, they evasively reply: "What should we say, my lord?" Hamlet then goes farther in his concession; he attempts to answer for them: "You were sent for." Still they persist in their effort to deceive him: "To what end, my lord?"

Even yet Hamlet finds it hard to believe that his "good friends," who had been from "so young days brought up with him," and who had since been "so neighbored" to his heart, are utterly bad. He gives them another chance. And this time he uses the strongest form of appeal: "But, let me conjure you: By the rights of our fellowship, by the consonancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love," . . . It is pathetic to see the idealist tenaciously clinging to the hope that his two dearest friends will be loyal to him. The effort with which Shakespeare elaborates the point shows its importance.

When, instead of responding to this impassioned appeal of love, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern put their heads together in whispered consultation, Hamlet is forced to the bitter conclusion that they are not what he had taken them to be — that they are insincere in nature, treacherous in friendship, and must henceforth be treated as enemies. Yet in a later scene (III, II, 353–75) he still shows some consideration for them. Not until they actively aid in his destruction, willfully marshaling him to knavery — actually "making love" to their foul employment — does he utterly banish them from his heart and send them to their deserved death in England.

The next episode in this complex scene deals with the traveling players. And here Shakespeare, departing from his habit, comments on current affairs. He alludes with good nature to the recent opening of the little private theater in Blackfriars by the child-actors of the Queen's Chapel Royal, and the unseemly attacks these children were then making upon the "common actors" and the "common stages" — "so they call them." For a full discussion of this famous chapter in dramatic history, the reader may be referred to my *Life of William Shakespeare*.

The entrance of Polonius causes Hamlet to revert to the theme he had already broached in the "fishmonger" passage. "O Jephthah, judge of Israel, what a treasure hadst thou!" he says to the father of Ophelia. Jephthah was famous as the man who sacrificed his own daughter. That Hamlet's suspicion regarding Ophelia thus breaks out again shows how persistently it is running in his mind; as Polonius himself observes: "Still [= constantly] on my daughter!"

The entry of the traveling players from "the city" — presumably Wittenberg — enables Shakespeare again to lift the veil for a moment and give us a glimpse of the kind of young man the hero was before the play began. Hamlet greets the actors not only with enthusiasm but with the

utmost familiarity. "You are welcome, masters! welcome, all!" Shaking one by the hand: "I am glad to see thee well"; shaking others by the hand: "Welcome, good friends!" Then, suddenly recognizing a particular actor, he leaps forward to greet him: "O, my old friend!"; and he jests with him: "Thy face is valanced since I saw thee last; comest thou to beard me in Denmark?" Next he turns his attention to the little boy who played the women's parts: "What, my young lady and mistress!" he playfully draws the lad toward him: "By'r Lady! your ladyship is nearer heaven than when I saw you last by the altitude of a chopine"; and lowering his voice in mock anxiety: "Pray God your voice, like a piece of uncurrent gold, be not cracked within the ring."

That Hamlet should be friends with Horatio or with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is not strange, for they are men of courtly rank. But that he should be on terms of familiar fellowship with "public players" is both strange and significant. He hails them as old comrades, jests with them in the most intimate way, and knows their stock of plays, some almost by heart. Quite obviously, therefore, in his normal condition he was of a cheerful, even jovial disposition, ready to "drink deep" with boon companions, quick to bandy wit with the merry, and enthusiastic over public amusements. What a change, Shakespeare would have us feel, from that light-hearted and fun-loving young man to the melancholy and moping creature we see in the play!

With something of his old-time spirit of jollity, Hamlet calls upon one of the actors to recite for him a certain passionate speech from a play dealing with the story of Troy. The actor complies, and renders the passage with such true histrionic feeling that he completely loses himself in the part; his emotions are stirred to the depths, his voice trembles, his face turns color, and tears of genuine pity spring into his eyes. Polonius is astonished; and Hamlet, with his

more sensitive nature, is so profoundly moved that he asks all to leave him.

As the actors pass out, Hamlet plucks the manager of the troupe by the sleeve, and arranges to have *The Murder of Gonzago* presented before Claudius on the following night. He asks: "You could, for a need, study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would set down and insert in't, could you not?" Hamlet selects this particular stock-play because, as he knows, it deals with the murder of a ruling sovereign by means of poison (based probably on the historical incident of the poisoning of the Duke of Urbino in 1538 by one Luigi Gonzago). With a malicious pleasure — which is characteristic of melancholia, and which so often expresses itself in Hamlet's cutting remarks to his uncle, to Polonius, and to others — he resolves to have that murder-play presented before Claudius in order to annoy him; and, in order to increase the annoyance, he plans to insert "some dozen or sixteen lines" pointed with special thrusts. As yet he has not conceived the idea of altering the plot of the play so as to make it "like the murder" of his father, and by that means using it as a test of his uncle's guilt; for he has no doubt whatsoever as to that guilt.

Having dispatched Polonius and the players, Hamlet quickly rids himself of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and being now alone he utters a soliloquy. Shakespeare thus closes the Second Act by giving us a glimpse into the mind of the hero. The importance of this soliloquy — indicated by its strategic position, its unusual length, and its complexity — lies in the fact that it comes after two months of inactivity. It should therefore reveal to us the strange mental condition under which during this period of inactivity Hamlet has been laboring.

The soliloquy falls into two distinct parts; the first is a whirlwind of self-denunciation at his delay — a delay that

is absolutely inexcusable; the second is an attempt to justify that delay as something altogether warranted. The sudden change in mood, and the obvious inconsistency of the two parts, should put us on our guard, and warn us to seek an explanation.

Hamlet begins by launching into a bitter tirade against himself for his shameful inactivity. He calls himself "a rogue," a "peasant slave"; he declares that his delay is not other than "monstrous." He compares the spirit exhibited by himself — a man of the noblest birth, of soldierly training, and of high standards of honor — with the spirit exhibited by "this player" — a "common actor," of low birth, ranked by law among "rogues, vagabonds, and sturdy beggars." The player, moved by only a bit of "fiction," an imaginary tale concerning Hecuba, whom he had never seen, and who was not akin to him ("What's Hecuba to him?"), had been so stirred to the very soul that passion dominated all his being. "What would he do," exclaims Hamlet, "had he the motive, and the cue, for passion that I have!" — the motive, "a dear father murdered" and a mother "seduced," the cue, a visitation from the other world by his father prompting him to revenge. "What would he do!" Then Hamlet, making the application to his own conduct, says: "Yet I ——" The unfinished line, indicating a despairing wave of the hand, expresses utter disgust. He calls himself, with wilting scorn, a "dull and muddy-mettled rascal"; his behavior is that of a contemptible "John-a-dreams"; he is "unpregnant" of his cause — unable to give birth to any action — "No, not for a King upon whose property and most dear life a damn'd defeat was made." The very bitterness of his self-denunciation reveals his inward anguish.

In perplexity he asks why it is he does not stir in this most important and sacred duty. He knows precisely what he should do. He has the means and power to do it. He wishes

with all his heart to do it. He clearly realizes how "monstrous" is his failure to do it. Why, then, his strange inactivity? The only answer he can think of is that he is "pigeon-livered." "Am I a coward?" he asks. We know that he is none. Ophelia tells us that he is famed as a soldier; and his fight with the pirate ship reveals personal daring of the highest type. Hamlet, too, knows that he is no coward; and in the lines that immediately follow he rejects the idea as absurd.

Yet, unable to find any other *possible* explanation for his failure to kill Claudius, he returns to the charge. He *must* be pigeon-livered —

> Or, ere this,
> I should have fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal.

And, accepting for the moment this hypothesis, he tries to arouse himself to action by a fury of words. Summoning all his pent-up hatred, he shouts:

> Bloody, bawdy villain!
> Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
> O! vengeance!

There flashes into our minds the image of a lion lashing itself into a state of fury. But Hamlet does not succeed. All he can produce is mere "words"; and in disgust he says: "Why, what an ass am I!" Certainly there is no lion-like quality in a man's unpacking his heart with words, and falling a-cursing "like a very drab, a scullion."

In view of what is to come, we should here pause to note that Hamlet does not for a moment entertain the smallest doubt that his father had been murdered, or that Claudius was guilty. It is because he has no doubt whatsoever that he suffers so keenly, and berates himself so bitterly. Further, we should note that in cursing himself for his shameful delay he fails to derive any comfort in the thought that by

playing the madman he has somehow been working toward his revenge. Two months' inactivity, indeed, has rendered the scheme of feigned insanity absurd. No longer can he quiet his soul with the pretense that his antic behavior is a preparation for the deed. And so, stripped of that false excuse, he stands in his own eyes without a vestige of self-respect.

As he considers his contemptible inactivity his suffering increases, until at last it reaches a climax. He *must* find some relief. And in despair he appeals to his brain: "About, my brain!"

We may pertinently ask, What has his *brain* to do with it? He *knows* that his "dear father" had been murdered by a "remorseless, treacherous villain" — he has just said so. He *knows* that the perturbed spirit of that "dear father" had come from the other world to prompt him to revenge — he has just said so. Still further, he *knows* that it is his sacred duty to kill Claudius, and do it quickly. And, finally, he *knows* that he has the power necessary to accomplish his task. On none of these points does he feel the smallest doubt. What he should appeal to therefore is his strong right arm. Yet, as he has freely confessed, he is unable to lift that strong right arm. It is, in truth, a clear realization of his inability to do the deed, the necessity and justice of which he fully recognizes, that causes in him such terrible agony of soul. And now, as that agony reaches a point where it is unendurable, he is compelled to seek some form of relief — and hence he appeals in desperation to the one faculty of his that is not paralyzed, the brain.

The only way in which his brain can furnish him with relief is to manufacture some plausible excuse for his past "monstrous" inactivity, and devise some kind of substitute activity — mental activity — to divert his attention from his suffering. And at once his brain, spurred by despair, begins to work in its feverish sickly way. We can actually see the

thoughts as they rise, and build themselves up one on the other. "You are planning," says brain, "to have a play acted before the guilty Claudius on to-morrow night. Now I have heard that sometimes guilty persons at a play have been so struck to the soul that they have openly revealed their crimes. *The Murder of Gonzago*, since it deals with the poisoning of a king, will vex Claudius, but hardly more. Therefore have the actors present the poisoning-scene in a fashion closely resembling the murder of your father. And when that scene is presented, observe your uncle's looks. Tent him to the quick! If he but blench, *you will know your course.*"

What would be Hamlet's "course"? To take revenge on Claudius. Did he not already know that? Was it not his failure during the past two months to pursue that very course that had caused him such anguish of soul? Had not his father in person visited him and ordered that specific course? Why should he have to be told again what he should do, and told in a much feebler way? His brain must meet that objection. And hence it creates a brand-new idea: "The spirit that you have seen *may* be the devil." Hamlet had not before entertained that thought. Clearly it was evolved by his sickly brain under the spur of necessity. Some excuse must be forthcoming; this one will serve. And Hamlet, seizing upon it, elaborates it in an effort to make it plausible:

> Yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness, and my *melancholy* —
> As he is very potent with such spirits —
> Abuses me to damn me.

Here at last is relief. Blame is shifted upon the Ghost. And what a damnable spirit it is — the devil himself, seeking to ensnare a human soul! And how completely justified Hamlet is in not believing its message and obeying its foul command!

Yet previously Hamlet had said with absolute conviction: "It is an honest Ghost, that let me tell you!" And we know, from all that has preceded and all that follows, that in his heart he never really doubted it was his own "dear father" who had appeared to him. Nor did he doubt that Claudius was guilty. Why, his very soul had been prophetic on that score; only a moment ago he was positive about it. But now, in his despair, he grasps like a drowning man at this straw of an excuse. With feigned conviction he shouts: "The play's the thing!" And he rushes out to busy himself with writing the proposed scene.

In the strange and unexpected ending of the soliloquy — an ending that is entirely inconsistent with the beginning, and that constitutes almost a comic anticlimax — we see whither Hamlet's sickly brain has led him; it has suggested a hitherto unthought-of reason for his delay, and has provided him with a bit of mental activity (of which alone he is capable) as a substitute for the great task he is unable to perform. We should have little difficulty, however, in understanding that his suddenly evolved doubt as to Claudius' guilt, and his over-busy preparation of the test-play are, like his long feigning of madness, merely excuses to quiet the inner agony of his soul. The soliloquy itself renders that clear. Yet, lest some uncritical person might think that the innocence of Claudius, and hence of Gertrude, is a serious question in Hamlet's mind — the real motive of his delay — Shakespeare gives further negative evidence. Hamlet, in his very next utterance, spoken only a short time later, and *before the play has been presented*, says: "To be, or not to be — *that* is the question." No longer is there any question in his mind as to whether the horrible crimes had been committed; for if he thought that his uncle might be an entirely innocent man, and his mother quite free from the sins with which she had been charged, he would not be longing so devoutly for an escape from that "heart-ache" which

makes him sick of life. Further, *after the play had been presented*, and had fully proved the guilt of Claudius, he is not a whit more able to act, even when a "pat" opportunity is at once offered him. And when a few hours later the Ghost comes to reproach him for his "almost blunted" resolution, he frankly admits that all this while he has been merely "lapsed in time." Thus the play is *not* "the thing"; it gets him no nearer the deed than did feigned insanity. Hamlet himself confesses that both were poor excuses for delay, and that, consequently, he deserves from his father a chiding.

ACT III

Scene I

The scene opens on the following day with Claudius requesting the two spies, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to make a report. They have to confess that by none of their "drifts" can they discover why Hamlet "puts on this confusion"; thereupon they are dismissed.

Our attention is next shifted to Polonius, who, having worked out the details of his plan to entrap Hamlet, is now ready to spring his invention. He is going to "loose" Ophelia — the image is that of loosing a dog on its prey — on Hamlet, who, we are told, is accustomed here at this time of day to walk in melancholy depression. Ophelia, as later appears, has already been instructed in the part she is to play; and from a curtained gallery above the King and Polonius are to observe Hamlet's reaction to her carefully devised words and behavior. The success of the trap will mainly depend on the skill with which the bait has been prepared.

The Queen having been sent away, Polonius becomes the busy stage-manager of the little scene he has planned.

"Ophelia," he says, "walk you here"; and he places her in exactly the right position. We can hardly escape the conclusion that he has not only drilled her in what she is to do, but also told her, at least in part, what she is to say; she has brought with her the various jewels Hamlet had given her as presents, and holds them ready to produce at the right moment, with the right words. Having placed her correctly on the stage, Polonius puts in her hands a beautiful illuminated prayer-book, with the instruction: "Read on this book, that show of such an exercise [that is, prayer] may color your loneliness." In an aside he reveals that, even with his low standards of morality, he keenly feels the insincerity of the part he is making his daughter act:

> We are oft to blame in this —
> 'Tis too much prov'd — that with devotion's image
> And pious action we do sugar o'er
> The devil himself!

The trap now properly arranged, with the bait set — Ophelia, prayer-book in hand, jewels ready to be produced, and speeches prepared — Polonius and the King go into the upper gallery, and place themselves so as to watch through the parted curtains.

For a time Ophelia stands, with every appearance of childlike innocence, pretending to be engaged in prayer. Slowly Hamlet enters — a melancholy, pathetic figure. So deeply sunk is he in misery of soul that he fails to see her, and hence continues the sad brooding in which, as we are told, "he walks for hours together here in the lobby." Wearily he murmurs: "To be, or not to be — that is the question." Again he is contemplating suicide, longing with infinite desire to make an end of his suffering with a bare bodkin. In the preceding soliloquy he admitted that he was the victim of melancholia ("my melancholy"); now he exhibits one of the most striking symptoms of that ailment.

Macpherson writes: "The most important symptom in this [sub-acute], as in all forms of melancholia, is the presence of the suicidal impulse. Perhaps in the form we are now considering, the danger of suicide is most great, because the patients possess the full command of their reasoning powers, as well as the power of fixing the attention upon any definite act or proposal." And Régis speaks of the patient's "conscious and *reasoning* tendency to suicide." Even Hamlet's rejection of suicide on the ground of a fear of "something after death" is a recognized characteristic of melancholia. As Macpherson says: "Most of the patients are afraid of dying; perhaps they dread death more than anything else; but the dread of the many and terrible evils which they constantly expect to overwhelm them [cf. Hamlet's "sea of troubles"] may suddenly become stronger than the dread of death." And Régis writes: "The melancholiac has a strong enough desire to die, as, with all the morbid ideas that haunt his brain, life is a burden [cf. Hamlet's "Who would fardels bear"]; but he is most frequently incapable of making a serious effort to destroy himself, or to employ the least energy in carrying out the project." In other words, with respect to suicide the melancholic exhibits "the same characters of inertia and indecision" that appear in all his efforts at "a definite act or proposal."

So Hamlet, feeling himself unable to act, even in this much-desired matter of suicide, produces an excuse — a religious fear of "something after death." His initial energy spends itself in intellectual speculation, and he ends, as always, in passivity. He himself observes the fact:

> And thus the native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

The image is that of sickness and health, the natural ruddy hue of physical well-being contrasted with the pallor of disease. Hamlet notes how in this matter of suicide the flush

of his first resolve to do the deed is rendered pale and sickly by "too much thinking." He goes further, and applies the generalization to his behavior in the more imperative task of revenge:

> And enterprises of great pith and moment
> With this regard their currents turn awry
> And lose the name of action.

He sees clearly how his original resolve to "sweep" to his revenge, at first glowing with the red hue of health, has been rendered pale by too much thinking. His physical activity has been completely usurped by mental activity. Only his brain has functioned, and that in a sickly way, producing such poor excuses as, "I shall put an antic disposition on," or "The spirit I have seen *may* be the devil." As a result, his enterprise — an "important" task, "of great pith and moment" — has "lost the name of action." In these words, disclosing an effort at self-analysis, he clearly states the symptoms of his unhealthy condition; he is unable, however, to diagnose the cause.

Suddenly he spies Ophelia. His first impression is that of her wonderful beauty: "The fair Ophelia!" Then he observes that she is at her private devotions; and taking her "seeming" to be real, he speaks with genuine humility: "Nymph, in thy orisons be all my sins remembered."

Ophelia thereupon closes the prayer-book, and begins to play her part as she had been instructed by her father. Looking reproachfully at Hamlet, she speaks in a deeply injured tone: "Good my lord, how does your honor *for this many a day*?" In other words, by implication: "Why have you ignored me for these many days? Why have you not visited me, as of old? I am deeply wounded at your long neglect of me." And there is hurt in her voice and eyes. Instantly Hamlet is on the alert, for Ophelia's speech is nothing less than astounding. "For this many a day" — to be specific, for two full months — he had tried his best to

see her. He had called at her house, and she had bluntly denied him access; he had written to her, and she had cruelly "repelled" his letters. Only on the preceding day, when he made a determined effort to see her, she had refused him admission. Yet, in spite of her effort to avoid him, he had forced his way into her private room — he had thus seen her *quite recently*; and on that occasion her behavior towards him was entirely inconsistent with her present attitude. Polonius' stupidity in making her speak and act in this lying fashion is only too apparent. Hamlet rightly commented: "Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in's own house."

Since Hamlet's suspicions are aroused, he drops into the protection of his feigned madness: "I humbly thank you, well, well, well." The first attack thus fails, and Ophelia proceeds to a second. In a grieved voice she says: "My lord, I have remembrances of yours that I have longed *long* to re-deliver." That statement, too, is an obvious falsehood; she could not have "longed long" to re-deliver these gifts, since up to the present day she had firmly blocked his every attempt to see her or to communicate with her. Hamlet's naturally inquisitive mind, already aroused to suspicion, says, I wonder what she's up to now; and hence he answers, on his guard: "No, not I. I never gave you aught." Still Ophelia persists in acting the part laid out for her. Producing the jewels — brought for this purpose — she utters some pithy, proverbial wisdom in the exact style of old Polonius, such as "Rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind." We instinctively feel that she is repeating words supplied by her father, as well as acting out an insincere scene contrived by him. With the strange and unwarranted charge of unkindness on his part in failing to visit her, she extends the "rich gifts" at arm's length, and with eyes expressing wounded love, stands looking at him, reproachfully, silently, expectantly. This is the climax of the scene Polonius had

devised. Ophelia is now, presumably, exercising upon her lover all her powers of fascination.

But Polonius, who was responsible for the gross insincerity in Ophelia's words and actions, was stupid — for the simple reason that the whole situation involves a patent lie. Hamlet naturally is astonished at the inconsistency between Ophelia's previous harsh rejection of him, and her present luring attitude. For a moment, in sheer perplexity, he stands looking at her. Then two involuntary exclamations escape his lips: "Ha! — Ha!" These exclamations express not merriment, but surprise and sudden understanding. Polonius, ever full of curiosity, in his eagerness to watch Hamlet, cranes his neck too far, and slightly stirs the curtains. Hamlet catches the movement in the corner of his eye, and quick as a flash understands the situation. He realizes that he is in a trap; the King and Polonius are seeking to discover whether or no he is "mad in craft," and, so he thinks, are using Ophelia as their bait.

What kind of trap is it? The words and behavior of Ophelia give Hamlet his answer — an answer clearly revealed to us both in Saxo Grammaticus and in the novel of Belleforest upon which the play is based. Hamlet thinks that Claudius and Polonius, in their effort to discover whether he really is mad or not, are employing a familiar old medico-legal test of insanity. This test was to place some woman, whom the suspected person was known formerly to have loved, alone with him to offer him lewd temptations. If the supposed madman yielded to her temptations, he was, it was believed, merely feigning insanity, for an insane person was thought to be incapable of the passion of love. The matter can best be explained by citing the episode in the prose novel from which the present scene ultimately was derived. I quote from the English translation:

Hamblet, in this sorte counterfeiting the madde man, many times did divers actions of great and deepe consideration, and often

made such and so fitte answeres that a wise man would soone have judged from what spirite so fine an invention mighte proceede. . . . But men of quicke spirits, and such as hadde a deeper reache [cf. Polonius: "We of wisdom and of reach"] began to suspect somewhat, esteeming that under that kinde of folly there lay hidden a greate and rare subtilty, such as one day might bee prejudiciall to their prince, saying that under colour of such rudenes he shadowed a crafty pollicy, and by his devised simplicitye he concealed a sharp and pregnant spirit; for which cause they counselled the King to try and know, if it were possible, how to discover the intent and meaning of the young prince; and they could find no better nor more fit invention to intrap him then to set some faire and beawtifull woman [whom Hamblet was known dearly to love] in a secret place, that, with flattering speeches and all the craftiest meanes she could use, should purposely seek to allure his mind to have his pleasure of her. . . . To this end certaine courtiers were appointed to leade Hamblet into a solitary place within the woods, whether they brought the woman, inticing him to take their pleasures together. . . . And surely the poore prince at this assault had him in great danger if a gentleman [= Horatio] (that in Howendile's [Hamlet's father's] time had been nourished with him) had not showne himselfe more affectioned to the bringing up he had received with Hamblet then desirous to please the tirant . . . gave Hamblet intelligence in what danger he was like to fall if by any meanes hee seemed to obay or once like the wanton toyes and vicious provocations of the gentlewoman sent thither by his uncle. Which much abashed the prince, as then wholly beeing in affection to the lady. But by her he was likewise informed of the treason, as being one that from her infancy loved and favored him, and would have been exceeding sorrowfull for his misfortune . . . whome shee loved more than herselfe.

Hamlet has every reason to believe that Claudius and Polonius are seeking by this well-known device to entrap him; the whole situation suggests it, with the woman whom he is supposed formerly to have loved deceitfully playing an alluring part, and his enemies craftily watching from concealment. We, of course, know that Polonius' purpose is only to prove that Hamlet's madness springs from rejected love; further, we know that Ophelia is entirely innocent of

any treachery to Hamlet, and unaware of any grossness in the part she is taking. But Hamlet does not possess our full information. He is painfully conscious that his lunacy is counterfeit; he had just discovered that his enemies are suspicious, for they had set spies upon him; he knows that the King is eager "to ravel this matter out" whether he is essentially in madness or mad in craft. Therefore he is not at all astonished that Claudius, with the aid of Polonius, should be thus trying to ensnare him. But he is greatly astonished that Ophelia should have a part in the business, and such a part as the bait for this trap requires. Hence he bluntly asks her: "Are you honest?" — that is, chaste. Does she know what she is doing? Is she a willful ally of theirs? To what extent is she aware of the obscene nature of the part she is taking in this affair as ugly as "the devil himself"?

Her simple reply, "My lord!" carries with it so much surprise and hurt that it convinces him of her innocence. He thinks her ignorant of the grossness in the rôle she has been made to assume; and he infers that she is entirely unaware of the attempt of his enemies to entrap him — that she is merely a weak tool in the hands of her father and the scheming villain. And being now satisfied as to her innocence, he shifts to a warning. In a milder voice he asks: "Are you fair?" Ophelia does not understand at what he can possibly be driving: "What means your lordship?" Hamlet is touched with pity. She is wonderfully beautiful, and she has the simplicity almost of a child. Living in a thoroughly corrupt Court, with a "lecherous villain" as a King, and possibly a Jephtha-fishmonger type of father, she is in great danger. Her marvelous beauty is the source of that danger. And Hamlet warns her to keep her virtue ever on guard over that beauty. He had just given a warning of a similar sort to her father: "Do not let Ophelia walk in the sun; the sun breeds maggots in what it kisses. Your daughter's chastity is in grave peril. Friend, look to it!" Obviously the two

warnings bear a relation one to the other. They both concern Ophelia's virtue, which Hamlet fears is in danger. To Polonius he bluntly indicated that the source of that danger was the King; to Ophelia he gently points out the necessity of her keeping virtue constantly on guard over her beauty.

Ophelia, in her embarrassment, intentionally misinterprets what he says; and Hamlet lets her have her way, but with the further warning: "The power of Beauty will sooner transform Virtue from what it is to a bawd, than the force of Virtue can translate Beauty into its [that is, Virtue's] likeness."

After silently contemplating her for a moment, he takes a new tack: "I did love thee once." Ophelia, with a smile of confidence, replies: "Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so." Quick as a flash he retorts: "You should not have *believed* me. . . . I loved you not." And with trembling lips she murmurs: "I was the more deceived."

What can be Hamlet's purpose in thus wounding her? Is he seeking merely to be cruel, or is he being cruel in order to be kind? Since he is giving a warning to her, and unquestionably still loves her, we must accept the latter interpretation. The meaning he seeks to convey to her may be paraphrased as follows: "All men are bad; all men, without exception, are so inoculated with the old stock of sin that they relish of it. I myself — and I admit that I am reasonably 'honest' — offer an example, for even I was trying to deceive you. Believe no man. All men are bent on seducing women. Do not believe the next man — Claudius — when he tells you he loves you, for he assuredly will be trying to deceive you."

Hamlet looks at her again in silence. She is so weak, so utterly helpless that he feels he must find some way to save her. Yet he realizes that in his present condition he can do little, for he is unable to save himself. At last he gently says to her: "Get thee to a nunnery." The play, we should re-

member, is distinctly Roman Catholic in its setting; therefore Hamlet thinks of a nunnery for her as the safest haven of refuge from a corrupt world. There alone — since he is now powerless to aid her — would she be free from the machinations of Claudius, who has the witchcraft of wit to seduce. The present scene is commonly referred to as "The Nunnery Scene," because Hamlet so often advises Ophelia to seek the protection of the Church. We can hardly fail to connect this advice with his earlier advice to Polonius: "Let her not walk i' the sun. . . . Your daughter may conceive in a way that is not a blessing."

But Hamlet cannot forget the presence of his enemies above, and, as he talks, inserts a sharp thrust at Claudius: "I am very proud! — revengeful! — ambitious! — with more offenses at my beck than" . . . He is daring to the point of rashness, as he so often is when talking for the ear of the King. Returning to the problem of Ophelia and her danger, he says to her: "We [men] are arrant knaves all. Believe *none* of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery."

Ophelia makes no reply, for she has no conception of what is in his mind. But something in her behavior — was it a smile at his suggestion that she enter a nunnery? — may have irritated him. At any rate, he suddenly determines to test her. He lays a trap for her: "Where's your father?" The question places her in a most embarrassing position. She knows that her father is a few feet away concealed behind the curtain listening. Yet, with the innocent look of a child, she answers: "At home, my lord." Ophelia knows that is a lie; and Hamlet knows it is a lie. Further, he knows that it was deliberately told in order to deceive him and *protect his enemies*. It turns his heart against her. She can, with most devout visage, pretend to be engaged in prayer; she can, with every appearance of sincerity, act out a deceitful scene; she can, with naïve glibness, utter the lie direct — and all, he thinks, to please the King. At once he becomes

cynical, even brutal towards her. He changes his former kindly advice, "Get thee to a nunnery," into cutting sarcasm, as with a sneer on the word "nunnery" he emphasizes its well-known meaning of "a house of ill-fame." And throughout the rest of the scene (and the rest of the play — note especially his insulting remarks to her before and during the performance of the Mouse-Trap) he treats her with relentless acrimony.

Further, since she allies herself with the enemy, he will use her to give the eavesdroppers abundant evidence that *this* test of counterfeit madness fails to entrap him. Accordingly, upon her head he begins to pour a vitriolic attack on womankind in general, again and again returning to add to his denunciation of feminine insincerity. If he was mainly talking with purpose for the ears of Claudius and Polonius, he was also in large part expressing his real sentiments; for with his loss of faith in Ophelia he has lost his faith in all women. He had regarded his mother and his sweetheart as the two best examples of their sex; he has now discovered, so he thinks, that both are false, both utterly unworthy. In his bitterness, he conjures up miscellaneous evidence of feminine hypocrisy: "I have heard of your painting, too. You jig, you amble, you lisp, and nickname God's creatures." . . . And in a final burst of anger at woman's insincerity he shouts: "Go to! I'll no more on't. It hath made me mad!"

Yet not all his words are directed at womankind, for, with characteristic and fatal daring, he cannot resist the temptation to hurl barbed clauses at the spying listeners. To Claudius he says: There is *one* married man who shall not live long. To Polonius he says: You are a fool; go home and lock the doors on your folly.

When at last he rushes out in a wild storm of passion, Claudius and Polonius sneak from their hiding. "Love!" scornfully exclaims the King; "What he spake, though it

lacked form a little, was not like madness." There rings in his mind those ominous words: "I am revengeful!"; "I have more offenses at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in"; "Those that are married — all but one — shall live." And fiercely he adds: "I have, in quick determination, thus set it down: he shall, with speed, to England" — there, as we know, to be killed upon landing, not even shriving-time allowed.

Polonius, however, begs for one more chance to exercise his "wisdom and reach" in a second spying-scene; and Claudius, having fully made up his mind about Hamlet's madness, and having definitely determined on his course of action, offers no objection.

Act III, Scene II

The scene opens on the night of the same day, just before the hour set for the Court performance by the traveling troupe. Since in the Shakespearean age Court performances usually began shortly before midnight, we may safely assign that time to the present scene.

The young Prince is shown to us conversing with the "three players" who are to act his specially devised Mouse-Trap scene, namely the Player-King (= the elder King Hamlet), the Player-Queen (= Queen Gertrude), and the poisoner Lucianus (= Claudius). In order to render the old tragedy of *Gonzago* "something like the murder" of his father, Hamlet had rewritten "one scene of it," making the details accord with the crime of Claudius as nearly as he could guess from the brief account given by the Ghost. And now in his hands he holds the manuscript of that scene — the author's manuscript, which in Elizabeth's time was used as the prompt copy. He has just finished a rehearsal with the actors, carefully drilling them in the proper delivery of their lines: "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced

it to you"; and, following that, he gives them elaborate instructions on the art of acting in general. It might be supposed that the professional actors, being the distinguished "tragedians of the city" (where, as we are told, they were "much followed"), do not need technical advice from an amateur, but are quite capable of presenting Hamlet's little scene unaided. Yet Hamlet has been painstakingly training them, even up to the last minute; he has actually spoken the lines for them; and now, in conclusion, he gives them miscellaneous advice about utterance, gestures, and seemly deportment on the stage. The extraordinary amount of time and care he spends on the scene — out of all proportion to the necessity of the case — is, of course, significant. It shows us that the effort of preparing for the Mouse-Trap — first in composing the text, and later in arranging its presentation — gives him a grateful relief from his mental distress. It was for this very purpose that his "brain," when appealed to, had devised the scheme. And how necessary to him is some such relief is evinced by the fact that when his mind is not thus employed he falls into melancholic brooding — witness his mood in the soliloquy, "To be or not to be," of a few hours earlier.

Finally dismissing the actors, he calls in Horatio, who enters with his usual good spirits. Hamlet places his arm about his friend's shoulder, and expresses admiration for him as the possessor of the ideal temperament. Then, with unfeigned envy, he proceeds to analyze that temperament. In so doing he gives us, in negative, a picture of himself; for Shakespeare created Horatio as a dramatic "foil," or contrast, to the hero in the specific matter of temperament. Perhaps here we have the secret of Hamlet's liking for this quiet, unobtrusive young man without wealth or title; for, as the old proverb goes, "unlikes attract." The Prince admires Horatio because in him he finds those qualities he misses in himself. And hence when he declares that

Horatio is "one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing," we are to understand that Hamlet is one that in suffering even a little suffers keenly; and when he declares that Horatio is "a man that Fortune's buffets and rewards hath ta'en with equal thanks," we are to understand that Hamlet is a man who cannot easily thrust trouble aside. Horatio is thick-skinned, phlegmatic, not readily upset by ill luck; Hamlet is thin-skinned, emotional, overwhelmed by the least misfortune. Horatio never is "passion's slave"; Hamlet, by his own confession, has for two months been helplessly "lapsed in passion."

At last, embarrassed by having seemed to flatter his friend to his face, Hamlet turns to the business he has in hand: "There is a play to-night before the king. One scene of it comes near the circumstance which I have told thee of my father's death." So Hamlet was forced to share his troubles with some one; and he has made Horatio his confidant. Ophelia should have stood in this intimate relation to him. We can readily imagine Romeo rushing with his troubles to Juliet, or Bassanio taking his problems to Portia; but we cannot think of Hamlet as going to Ophelia for comfort, advice, and aid. He had, indeed, tried to see her; but she had refused to have any communication with him. Since he needed the consolation of a confidant, he had gone to the only friend he has left in the world.

Yet, we should ask, how much had he told Horatio? Unquestionably he told him about Claudius' crime, and explained in detail the "circumstance" of the poisoning. But there is no reason to believe that he had revealed anything that would cast discredit upon his mother. Hamlet could not bring himself to lay bare her foul sins. Had he not exclaimed, "Break, my heart! — for I must hold my peace"? And had not his father, more wronged than he, laid upon him the solemn injunction: "Howsoever thou pursuest this act . . . leave her to Heaven"? He *must* keep silent about

her. And the text shows that he did. It will be noted, for instance, that in his impassioned urging of Horatio to "observe mine uncle," he says nothing about watching Gertrude, although half his scene was designed for her, and she, rather than Claudius, might be expected to give clear evidence of what Hamlet regarded as their common guilt. And it will be further noted that to the end of the play Horatio preserves his respect, even affection, for the Queen. We may well believe that Gertrude's infamy, never revealed, died with her, and that her sins were, as the Ghost commanded, left for Heaven alone to judge. Yet her conduct was the chief source of Hamlet's distress, the main cause of that agony of soul which was near to breaking his heart. Since, therefore, he could not fully confide in Horatio, his friend could not fully understand him — and hence could not fully comfort him.

In his instructions to Horatio about watching the face of the King, Hamlet again displays the over-elaborate care that marked his instructions to the actors, the significance of which has already been noted. While still engaged in this business, he is interrupted by a loud blast of trumpets announcing the approach of the royal party. "They are coming to the play," he whispers; "I must be idle" — that is, I must begin to act my assumed rôle of the madman.

The King and Queen take their places upon the chair of state set on a raised dais; the ladies group themselves upon low stools arranged in a semicircle on either side; and, as was customary at private Court theatricals, the gentlemen dispose themselves at the feet of the ladies. Gertrude graciously makes room for her son on the "state"; but with the remark "here's metal more attractive" he seats himself at the feet of Ophelia. His only purpose, of course, is to secure a position from which he can easily watch the faces of the royal pair.

Finally the play begins. It opens with an old-fashioned

dumb show performed to the accompaniment of soft music. Such dumb shows, usually placed at the beginning of each act, were common in early tragedies; but long before 1601 they had fallen into disuse, and were now regarded as distinctly archaic. Shakespeare employs the device, just as he does rhymed couplets, stilted end-stopped lines, and a flamboyant style, in order to give to *The Murder of Gonzago* the flavor of antiquity.

The dumb show, presenting in bold outline the events immediately to follow, clearly was devised by Hamlet, and carefully designed to suggest the murder of his father as nearly as the limited revelation by the Ghost admitted. Note, for instance, the clause: "The poisoner woos the Queen *with gifts*"; the Ghost had said that Claudius won Gertrude by means of "rich gifts." Possibly the dumb show is not in every detail so accurate, yet it is close enough to the actual facts to render Claudius conscience-stricken; and that effect must at once have been obvious to the shrewd eye of Hamlet. But Claudius is no physical coward. He realizes that the experience through which he must pass will be trying; yet what has he to fear? His crime is unknown — he feels sure of that. To make any stir now might draw suspicion on himself. So he suppresses his emotions by an effort of the will, and resolves to brave out the play. If only he can remain calm, and give little sign of his inner perturbation, no one will be the wiser. And doubtless he would successfully have endured the whole performance, had it not been for the annoying behavior of Hamlet — his sinister hints, his cutting remarks, and, above all, his *constant staring*; for Hamlet does not look at the players; in a most conspicuous way he turns his back to the actors, and "rivets" his eyes on the King. It is the disconcerting conduct of Hamlet, not the brief play, that causes the nerves of Claudius to give way.

The first part of Hamlet's scene is primarily designed for

the ears of his mother. The very manner in which the Player-Queen enters ("Enter a King and Queen, very lovingly, the Queen embracing him") suggests the characteristic behavior of Gertrude: "Why she would hang on him as if increase of appetite had grown by what it fed on." The opening lines of the text absurdly stress the trivial fact that at the time of the murder the Player-Queen had been married to her husband for thirty years. The unusual emphasis on that point would compel Gertrude to note the similarity to her own case, for she too had been married to her murdered husband for "full thirty" years. Next come the repeated allusions to a second marriage, which must have been fearfully embarrassing in their pointed application to her. Even more embarrassing to her — at least so Hamlet thought — are the allusions to murder. When the Player-Queen, hanging with exaggerated affection upon her husband, says, "None wed the second but who *killed the first*," we should recall Hamlet's instructions to the actor, "Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you." He desired to produce just the right effect. And now, with eyes fastened on his mother's face, he murmurs, "Wormwood! wormwood!" or, as the Second Quarto has it, "*That's* wormwood!" The accusation, he thinks, strikes home, for he fully believes her guilty in the murder. And he repeats the charge in stronger terms: "A second time I kill my husband dead!"

When the Player-Queen goes out, ending the first part of the scene, Hamlet interrupts to ask his mother: "Madam, how like you this play?" He really had derived little satisfaction from watching her face, for the reason that he had laid all his emphasis on the Player-Queen's allusions to killing her first husband, whereas Gertrude is entirely innocent of that crime, and even unaware that murder had been committed. The text of the First Quarto makes her innocence quite clear. In the closet scene that immediately fol-

lows, when Hamlet again repeats the accusation, she says:

> But, as I have a soul, I swear, by heaven,
> I never *knew* of this most horrid murder.

It is no wonder, then, that Gertrude fails to react to Hamlet's thinly veiled charges of murder.

But if Gertrude is little perturbed by the play, Claudius, who knows far more than she, has grown apprehensive, and seeks opportunity to escape: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offense in't?" Whereupon Hamlet mockingly challenges him: "No, no; they do but *jest*!"; this is merely "a fiction"; they "poison in jest — no *offense* in the world." How can there be the smallest offense, since the poisoning, in this case, is *not real*? The King is cornered by the reply. To cover his embarrassment he asks the simple question: "What do you call the play?" Like the flash of a rapier is Hamlet's reply: "*The Mouse-Trap*!" and boldly he adds: "Marry, how? Tropically" — concealing in figurative language a special meaning. The retort is so sinister, both in manner of utterance and in implication, that Claudius almost starts to his feet; and Hamlet, fearing lest his victim will at once put an end to the performance, hastens to soothe him: "This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the duke's name; his wife Baptista." To Claudius that is, of course, very reassuring. After all, the play has nothing to do with him; the persons concerned are well known in history, and lived far from Denmark; he need fear nothing. He will brave it out. And as he relaxes in his seat, Hamlet nails him there with the direct challenge: "'Tis a knavish piece of work, but what of that? Your majesty, and we, *that have free souls*, it touches *us* not. Let the *galled* jade wince!" Claudius cannot possibly leave now.

With the entrance of Lucianus, the second part of Hamlet's scene — the part designed for Claudius — begins. As

with stealthy tread ("thy uncle stole," said the Ghost) the villain approaches the aged king sleeping in the orchard ("sleeping within my orchard"), dramatically lifts the vial of poison ("with juice of cursed hebona in a vial"), and, stooping over, pours the mixture rank into the victim's ears ("and in the porches of my ears did pour the leperous distilment"), Hamlet's fixed gaze upon Claudius becomes more and more disconcerting. Looking hard and straight at his uncle, not at the actor, he says slowly: "He poisons him — in the garden — for his estate." When Claudius shows signs of collapse, Hamlet hastens to reassure him: "His name's Gonzago! The story is extant, and writ in very choice Italian." Under these soothing words, the King, by a supreme effort of the will, regains command of himself. Whereupon Hamlet immediately returns to the attack: "You shall see, anon, how the *murderer* gets the love of" — suddenly extending his arm at full length he points his finger at Gertrude — "Gonzago's wife!"

This is too much for Claudius. His nerves give way, and he staggers to his feet hoarsely crying: "Give me some light! Away!" And he is supported out of the room by Gertrude on one side and Polonius on the other, with the courtiers following in great confusion.

Only Hamlet and Horatio are left upon the stage. At once Hamlet begins to sing and talk in a ridiculous way: "Would not this," he shouts, waving at Horatio the manuscript of the scene which had just created such a sensation, "get me a fellowship in a cry of players, sir?" Plainly he is in a state of reaction from the emotional strain through which he had just passed — very much as in that earlier scene following his trying interview with the Ghost, when he shouted "Hillo, ho, ho, boy! Come, bird, come!" and foolishly shook hands with his friends.

Even after the entrance of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, his hilarity persists. The way in which he hangs a

jest on everything they say, and openly makes sport of their seriousness, embarrasses them to the point of confusion; and, in a kind of self-defense, they pretend to be hurt by his strange manner. Rosencrantz, affecting deep reproach, says: "My lord, you once did love me." Hamlet cannot endure the charge of insincerity in love, even though he knows that his former friends deserve from him no consideration. And so he takes them aside for a confidential talk. Boldly throwing off his mask of lunacy, he asks: "Why do you go about to recover the wind of me, as if you would drive me into a toil?" If they complain of his failing in love, he will point out exactly where the blame lies. Then offering one of them a recorder — a musical instrument something like a flute — he requests him to play upon it; and when Guildenstern replies, "I cannot," Hamlet pointedly observes: "Why, look you now, how unworthy a thing you make of me — you would play upon me." Thus he answers their protest. When we recall the way in which, upon their first arrival, he had pleaded with them to be true to him, we can only admire his generous treatment of them in the face of their obvious disloyalty.

The entrance of Polonius interrupts Hamlet's conversation with his erstwhile school-fellows. That busybody has set another spying trap, this time with Hamlet's mother as the bait; and having just placed Gertrude in her private closet with instructions how to behave, he is now eager to drive his victim into the snare: "My lord, the Queen would speak with you, and presently" — that is, at once. Hamlet promises to go; and then, requesting them all to leave him, he seeks relief for his overtaxed feelings in a soliloquy.

The emotional exhilaration following the success of the Mouse-Trap is still upon him; and in the flush of that exhilaration he exclaims: "*Now* could I drink hot blood!" And we wonder whether, in view of the full confirmation he has just received, he is at last able to put forth the energy

needed to accomplish his task. For the moment, ignoring the fact that he never really had doubted the guilt of Claudius, we think that "now" perhaps he could act. At least we should like to know for certain. And Shakespeare promptly settles for us all our doubt. In the very next scene he creates an opportunity that Hamlet himself confesses to be ideal: "*Now* might I do it pat." But instead of swift action we get from him only more sickly thought, and further delay. There has been no change in his condition; and we might have known, without the dramatist telling us, that there could be no change in Hamlet so long as melancholia, with its paralyzing effect on the will, continues its hold upon him.

Having relieved some of his emotional excitement by fierce declarations that he will *now*, at once, kill Claudius, his attention shifts to the interview he must have with his mother. As her image rises in his mind, he exclaims: "O heart, lose not thy nature!" — that is, do not become *unnatural*. Precisely what impulse he is trying to suppress is revealed in the rest of the sentence: "let not ever the soul of Nero enter this firm bosom" — Nero, the famous example of a son who killed his own mother! Hamlet fears that in his present frame of mind he may murder Gertrude; and, on his way to visit her, he must stop and warn himself against that danger:

> Let me be cruel, not *unnatural*,
> I will speak daggers to her, *but use none*!

So strong is his impulse to do her bodily violence that he repeats the warning no fewer than six times. Yet he resolves that, though he will not kill her, he will "speak daggers to her," he will be as cruel to her as possible.

This attitude toward his mother is entirely new; and it violates the special injunction of his father: "Taint not thy mind, nor contrive against thy mother aught. Leave her to

Heaven." Yet now he goes to meet her, harshly resolved to punish her; "Let me be cruel," he says with grim determination. Obviously this mood reflects an unwholesome mental condition. It shows us that the recent experiences of the Mouse-Trap had stirred his emotions to the very dregs. And since emotional excitement is invariably serious for melancholic patients (cf. Krafft-Ebing, p. 310), we must expect in the succeeding scenes to find him in an aggravated condition of the disease.

Act III, Scene III

Claudius has just suffered a terrible shock; he has discovered that his crime is known to Hamlet, even in its minute details; and he has heard Hamlet shout: "The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge!" As a result he is in the clutches of a fear so overwhelming that he is driven to seek escape in further crime; he resolves to kill his nephew at once. Accordingly he orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to pack up immediately (it is already after midnight), and early in the morning take Hamlet aboard ship and away to England.

The replies of these two "sponges" of royal favor, when closely examined, show that they understand well enough Claudius' purpose to make away with their supposedly best friend. With Machiavellian reasoning they actually justify the King's course. Hamlet was not unaware of their treachery: "My two school-fellows, whom I will trust as I will adders fanged!" The punishment he ultimately accords them, therefore, they thoroughly deserved.

Having dispatched the nefarious business of Hamlet's coming murder, Claudius finds himself alone in his private bedroom, after midnight. The experience of the Mouse-Trap had shattered his nerves — the way in which he collapsed before the Court and had to be supported from the

stage indicates how complete was his loss of self-control. Although, during the past few minutes, stimulated by fear of personal safety, he was able to pull himself together in order to arrange for the killing of his nephew, now, with that task over, and with all persons departed, he stands, in the silence of his room, a prey to his thoughts. His mind naturally reverts to the play he had just witnessed with such terror. Memory, fired by the sight of his crime freshly enacted before his eyes, comes in startling vividness to plague him with all the sickening details. He is forced to live over again the horror of that occasion. Worse still, conscience, heretofore suppressed by force of will, now his will has broken down, begins to torture him. The conscience of a murderer is a terrible thing — as shown in the case of Macbeth. When aroused to full activity it produces torment unendurable; that is why many murderers give themselves up to justice, and some even beg to be punished. In what follows we see this "murderer's conscience" working upon a man whose self-control has been completely undermined.

Finding the torture of his conscience unendurable, Claudius suggests as a means of relief the possibility of prayer. But, as conscience pictures to him the "rank" nature of his offense, a crime marked with the primal eldest curse of God, he is forced to admit that he can find no escape here: "Pray can I not." What is he to do?

At last, out of his despair, comes, as a small ray of hope, the suggested excuse: "My fault is *past*" — the crime was committed as long ago as four months, and therefore is now ancient history. How pathetic is that little phrase! And how like a drowning man he clutches at it: "*Then*, I'll look up"! So he lifts his eyes toward heaven.

Instantly, however, he is checked by another difficulty. How can he frame a petition acceptable to that Judge above where nothing may shove by the hand of justice? Can he ask for forgiveness? Forgiveness, he well knows, must be

preceded by restitution; and he frankly admits that he is unwilling to surrender what he had gained by his crime. Restitution is out of the question.

"What then? What rests?" he asks. And, in confusion of mind, he suggests: "Try what repentance [divorced from restitution] can. What can it not?" But this escape also, as he at once admits, is impossible: "Yet what can it when one cannot repent?" It is only too obvious to him that he cannot *repent*, since even now, in order to assure the success of his first crime he is embarking on another as foul — the killing of his nephew; and he is unwilling to stop that murder. "O limed soul!" he groans, "that struggling to be free art more engaged!" — more deeply sunk in guilt as he now deliberately plans a second crime. He writhes in agony of despair: "O wretched state!"

Finally, in his desperation shutting his mind to all the moral issues involved, he exclaims: "Bow, stubborn knees!" and forces himself into the physical attitude of prayer. We realize, however, that this is meaningless action, inspired only by fear; that what we here see is not a soul looking up with contrite heart toward heaven, and so on the verge of salvation, but merely a common murderer — still the "remorseless, treacherous villain" that Hamlet rightly called him — being tortured by his outraged conscience, as every murderer at times is tortured.

Just as Claudius kneels in this hollow mockery of prayer, Hamlet enters, with the evidence of the Mouse-Trap fresh in his mind, and with the phrase "Now could I drink hot blood" scarcely off his lips. A moment ago we felt that at last he was ready to do the deed, and involuntarily the thought flashed into our minds: "O, if only he could have an opportunity — *now*!" Here is Shakespeare's answer to our wish — the opportunity itself, ideal in every way: the King's guilt clearly evinced, even to the assembled Court; Hamlet and his father's murderer alone together in a room

at midnight; Gertrude absent, and in no danger of being involved. Hamlet, understanding all this at a glance, has to admit that the opportunity is just such as he desired: "Now might I do it pat."

Yet, what we get from him is not action, but — a soliloquy! The deed "of great pith and moment" is promptly "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought"; the "important acting" gives way to a lame excuse for further delay; and at the end of the scene Hamlet steals out, to confess only a few minutes later to his father's accusing spirit that he deserves a chiding.

Note his first reaction when unexpectedly he finds himself face to face with his desired opportunity: "Now *might* I do it," he says. The word "might" is a key to all that follows. It indicates not resolution but mere possibility. And instead of his arm leaping instantly to the task, his brain begins to work in its feverish way. He stands unobserved at the door, with ample time to think. He speaks slowly, and we see the thoughts build themselves up in his mind. "Now *might* I do it" is brain-activity. After a pause he adds: "And now I'll do't"; that, too, is only brain-activity, for he does not do it, he merely *thinks* about doing it. In response to his faint resolve, "Now I'll do it," he starts to draw his sword, slowly, with the comment, "and so am I revenged"; but before he gets his sword entirely out he halts with the remark: "That would be scanned" — by the brain.

Once before we saw him behave in the same way. "O, vengeance!" he had shouted; and then, "About, my brain." And his brain manufactured an excuse for delay: "The spirit that I have seen *may* be the devil." Now, in similar fashion, he appeals to his brain; and his brain manufactures another excuse for still further delay, namely, that Claudius, if killed at this particular time, *might* go straight to the rewards of heaven — an excuse that Shakespeare has in advance made ridiculous to us.

But Hamlet, finding himself "now" — after the clear evidence of the Mouse-Trap and with an opportunity that is pat — unable to act, seizes upon this excuse for delay. Pushing his half-drawn sword back into its scabbard, he says: "Up, sword; and know thou a more horrid hent" — in the future.

Yet in his heart he is not entirely satisfied. He must further assure himself that in thus delaying the "important" deed he is actuated not by a humiliating lack of will-power, but by a genuine desire for a "more horrid" revenge than now is possible. And hence his brain feverishly rushes on to picture to him in most vivid imagery the terrible revenge he will — in the future — execute upon Claudius. The gruesome passage, too horrible to be quoted, ends with the lines:

> *Then* trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
> And that his soul may be as damn'd and black
> As hell, whereto it goes!

In this passage we have one of the most revolting sentiments in all Shakespeare. Hamlet declares, in language hardly equaled for repulsiveness, that he would destroy not only his uncle's body but also his *immortal soul*. If his first plan, to kill Claudius while he is in a mood of repentance, is less than revenge, this second plan is far more than revenge. It is inhuman. To damn souls, indeed, is the business of devils. Dr. Samuel Johnson, in revulsion at the passage, declares that it is "too horrible to be read, or to be uttered"; Hanmer writes: "This speech of Hamlet's has always given me great offense. . . . I wish our poet had omitted it"; Hunter comments: "In the whole range of the drama there is, perhaps, nothing more offensive." The passage seems to have left a disagreeable impression even on Shakespeare,[1] for

[1] How deep an impression it made upon other Elizabethan dramatists is shown by almost countless allusions to or parodies of the lines; more than a dozen such may be found in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher alone.

in his next play, *Othello*, he represents the Moor, a character less lofty than Hamlet, as saying:

> I would not kill thy unprepared spirit!
> No! Heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul!

Surely a sentiment thus universally condemned is inconsistent with the lovable disposition of Hamlet, whom Shakespeare repeatedly calls "noble," and whose nature he describes as "sweet." We cannot believe that these ugly lines denote him truly; we must believe that they are merely the feverish utterances of his sickly brain seeking to alleviate a distress that was otherwise unbearable. From what we already know of him we can readily understand how intense his distress would be when he suddenly realized his inability to act in a situation so favorable — after the sure evidence of his uncle's guilt, with his boast "now could I drink hot blood" still echoing in his mind, and facing an opportunity in every way ideal. The intensity of this distress adequately explains the violent nature of the brain's effort to give relief.

Some critics have suggested that Hamlet's failure to act in the present situation is due to an unwillingness to kill his enemy treacherously from behind. But the text gives no hint that such a thought is in the mind of either Hamlet or Shakespeare. Perhaps both regarded a stab in the back as justified, for such behavior was in accord with the prevailing ethics of revenge. Even if they did not, no necessity exists for Hamlet to take Claudius unawares. Were he now ready to perform his task, he could — and we feel that probably he would — lock the door, call the villain to account, accuse him of his crimes with the evidence full flush upon him, and then kill him in fair fight. The opportunity is pat for such heroic action.

But, instead of action of any kind, Hamlet, having spent his energy in sickly thought, steals away. At once the King rises, and, as if in direct answer to Hamlet's phrasing of the excuse, "So he goes to heaven," says:

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts *never to heaven go*!

Thus Shakespeare himself, in so many words, condemns Hamlet's refusal of the pat opportunity. After first showing us in a prologue to the episode that Claudius' praying has no relish of salvation in it, he adds this epilogue to remind us that Hamlet's excuse has no real justification.

Yet Shakespeare does not stop here. He represents the spirit of Hamlet's father as impelled to come at once from the other world in order to administer a rebuke: "This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose." How could Hamlet's purpose be "almost blunted" if in reality he was fiercely seeking a "more horrid" revenge? Even more convincing is Hamlet's guilty question: "Do you not come your tardy son to chide, that, lapsed in time and passion, lets go by the important acting?"

Clearly, then, there has been no change in Hamlet's condition. He fails to kill Claudius this time for exactly the same reason that he had not killed him on a score of pat opportunities during the past two months. The dramatist's representation of the hero has from the beginning been consistent.

The present scene, indeed, records an advance in Hamlet's melancholia. It shows us that his paralysis of willpower was never so complete, and his thoughts never so unwholesome. And since we are now in the Third Act, we should, on grounds of dramatic structure, expect him soon to reach the climax in his mental unhealth.

Act III, Scene iv

Polonius, having made all arrangements for his second spying trap — a supposedly confidential interview between mother and son — is giving a final admonition to Gertrude: "Look you lay home to him . . . be round with him," that

is, use strong language to him, do not mince matters. Gertrude replies: "I'll warrant you! Fear me not"; she will lecture him on his behavior, and lay it on soundly, too. As Hamlet calls within, Polonius creeps behind the arras ready to overhear. Gertrude carefully adjusts the folds about him, and then turns to meet her son.

Hamlet enters, we know, in a tense state of nervous excitement. His emotional nature, rendered unhealthy by melancholia, and recently stirred to a fury by the performance of the Mouse-Trap, has just been muddied to its depths by his experience over the kneeling Claudius. And now, fresh from that trying experience, he comes to his mother's room, almost in the spirit of Nero, resolved, though not actually to kill her, yet to speak "daggers" to her.

She, too, is resolved to be severe; and so, putting on a frown, she says in studied rebuke: "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended." With open contempt he mimicks her word for word — with, however, one very significant change: "Mother, *you* have my father much offended." The Elizabethans used "thou" as a term of endearment; the pronoun "you" was formal and distant (compare the German use of *Du* and *Sie*). Hamlet, with his absolute hatred of insincerity in any form, cannot bring himself to use to his mother a word that implies love. She — as, of course, did the audience — is quick to note the change; and, accordingly, she drops the intimate mode of address: "Come, come, *you* answer with an idle tongue." Again he mimicks her, but this time with a more emphatic change in the phraseology, a change that enables him to stab her with the epithet "wicked." Surprised and hurt — for she loves him dearly — she appeals to his affection: "Why, how now — Hamlet! Have you forgot me?" Instantly he retorts in words sharper even than daggers: "No, by the rood! not so! You are the Queen [a title kept at the cost of cheating him], your husband's brother's wife [guilty of incest], and, would it were

not so! — you are *my mother*!" The last remark was the most insulting thing he could say. Gertrude draws herself up with injured dignity: "Nay, then, I'll set those to you that can speak," and haughtily starts towards the door.

Hamlet seizes her and draws her back. She struggles. He forces her into a chair: "Come, and sit you down!" She attempts to leave; but he roughly forces her again into the chair: "You shall not budge!" How much struggling there is we cannot say, but enough to arouse Hamlet from his normal state of moody inertia to a state of irritable physical activity. Gertrude, frightened by the violence of his behavior, and with the sudden thought that she is in the power of a madman, begins loudly to scream for help. Her screams, rasping on Hamlet's already overwrought nerves, vastly increase his excitement. And then, instantly, he is startled by a man's voice from behind the hangings shouting: "What ho! Help!" Quick as a flash he whips out his rapier: "How now, a rat?" and with a swift pass through the arras, grimly adds: "Dead, for a ducat!"

We may ask why Hamlet is able to act so promptly — indeed without a second's delay — in this particular situation, whereas a few moments before he was quite unable to act in a far more important situation. If our diagnosis of his condition is correct, we must seek the answer in melancholia. Krafft-Ebing writes:

> The passive attitude of the patient may at any time change to a condition in which the patient is continually *excited* and *active*, and he obtains relief by expressing his mental pain and state of emotional tension in the most furious way . . . even in destructive acts (*agitated* or *active* melancholia). The cause of this state is not to be sought in increased readiness in the transformation of ideas into motor impulse, but in the enormous force with which the motor impulse is present in consciousness, which enables it to overcome all inhibition. The fact is that these agitated melancholic states form only the *height* of the general disease-picture, or are episodic phenomena in the course of passive melancholia.

Régis, in his discussion of "depressed" (as opposed to "exalted") melancholia, writes:

> They will do nothing. It is only on rare occasions that they are seized, *all at once*, with a kind of impulsive attack during which they give themselves up to *automatic* acts of violence (raptus).

And under the topic "hyper-acute melancholia," he notes:

> In a physical point of view, the depression is pushed to the extent of completely abolishing the general activity of the organism. Every effort is concentrated in the mental domain. . . . Occasionally, under the influence of a sudden impulse, they drop, all at once, their torpor, have a sudden spell of agitation, or commit some act of violence; then everything is again quiet, and they fall anew into their inertia.

In the light of these scientific observations on melancholia, we may turn to the behavior of Hamlet in the two situations under review.

When he stood quietly at the door of his uncle's bedroom there was nothing to excite him, and nothing to hurry him. He had abundant time to find an outlet for his emotions in mental activity. "That would be scanned," he whispered to his brain; whereupon his brain, promptly coming to the rescue — as formerly it did when appealed to — evolved an excuse for further delay; and at last, having spent his passion in sickly thought, he stole away unobserved. The second situation was altogether different. Hamlet was at the time in a violent altercation with his mother, and in a state of irritable activity — physical activity — as he struggled with her. Her screams greatly increased his emotional tension; and at once, on top of that, came the shock of a man's voice from behind the arras. Instantly he realized that he was in a trap. There was imminent peril. He had now no time to think, no opportunity for quiet deliberation; he could not whisper to his brain: "That would be scanned." The accumulated emotion, the excitement of the shouts, the imminent peril led to a sudden furor. Hamlet struck *before*

he could think. His act was impetuous, almost involuntary. It was not the calm, deliberate act of reasoned will-power. In the words of Régis, it was an "automatic act," the result of an irrepressible "impulse." Had he killed Claudius in the prayer-scene, his deed would have been the deliberate act of will. The difference between the two situations, therefore, explains the difference between the two reactions: in the first situation Hamlet produced no action at all, but found relief in thought; in the second, he produced no thought at all, but found relief in an impetuous action.

Gertrude, having risen from the chair and come forward, exclaims, "O me, what hast thou done?" Hamlet's reply, "Nay, I know not," indicates the unpremeditated character of his act. Then, with sudden hope, he asks her: "Is it the King?" Has he, at last, by good fortune, accomplished his great task? How glad he would be!

When, instead of answering his eager question, she again charges him with a "rash and bloody deed," he whirls upon her with the sarcastic retort: "Almost as bad, good mother, as kill a king and marry with his brother!" But her bewildered astonishment at the accusation of murder convinces him of her innocence of that crime; thereafter he does not even remotely allude to it.

As she starts to wring her hands and lament over the death of Polonius, Hamlet seizes her, and again forces her into the chair. And now he renews, what had been interrupted, his verbal torture of her: "I will speak daggers to her," he had said. He begins with a fury so unrestrained that she indignantly asks: "What have I done, that thou *dar'st* wag thy tongue in noise so rude against me?" In answer to this challenge he accuses her, not of murder (his entire emphasis heretofore had been on that crime), but merely of infidelity to her first husband. Having abandoned the notion that she had helped in killing his father, he confines himself to the charge that she had been an unfaithful wife, guilty of

the conduct that makes "marriage-vows as false as dicers' oaths." With searing words he brands upon her forehead the "scarlet letter" A, standing for "adultery." Repeating again the accusation in unmistakable terms, he pictures her breach of the marriage-contract in the blackest hues of lust — so ugly that "heaven's face doth glow" in shame, and the earth itself "is thought-sick" as against the doom. When Gertrude would deny the charge, Hamlet becomes at once specific. Quickly snatching back the curtains from the portraits of the elder Hamlet and of Claudius, he, as it were, points with his very finger at her "act of shame," and names to her the man: "Could you on *this* fair mountain leave to feed, and batten on *this* moor?"

Gertrude, realizing that her son has discovered her sin, buries her face in her hands, and confesses. In her "very soul" she sees "such black and grained spots as will not leave their tinct." And having confessed with tears, she begs for mercy: "O Hamlet, speak no more!" But he will show no mercy. His language becomes ever more cruel and insulting: "To live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love over the nasty sty!" Again she begs for mercy:

> O, speak to me no more.
> These words, like daggers, enter in mine ears.
> No more, sweet Hamlet!

But Hamlet has lost all control of himself. His furor mounts, and his words ruthlessly lash and cut. In agony she again pleads: "No more!" But he lunges on in a terrible whirlwind of denunciation. "Let me be cruel!" he had declared.

Suddenly he falls back in consternation as he sees the Ghost of his father looking at him in silent disapproval. The audience is as much startled as he, and the scene thus becomes electrified with interest.

Why, we may ask, did the Ghost reappear at this juncture? It has no further news to impart, and nothing more in the way of command. Its coming has no influence on the course of action. So far as subsequent events are concerned this second interview with Hamlet might be entirely dispensed with — as it often is in modern productions of the play. But the appearance of the Ghost serves a very important structural function, namely to mark the dramatic climax of the plot. Shakespeare almost invariably places the climax in the Third Act, and in the latter rather than the earlier half of the Act. Further, he almost invariably marks that climax by some startling episode; for instance, in *Macbeth* by the appearance of Banquo's Ghost at the festive table, in *Lear* by the bursting of the wild storm on the heath, in *Romeo and Juliet* by the sensational double duel in which Mercutio and Tybalt are slain. In *Hamlet*, since the play deals not with action but with inaction produced by an abnormal condition of the mind, we must expect to find the climax of the plot in the mental state of the hero — in melancholia.

Is there such a thing as a climax in melancholia? Régis writes: "Acute melancholia has habitually a regular course, susceptible of division into distinct periods"; and he treats the symptomatology of the disease under the headings: I, Period of Invasion; II, Period of Full Development, or Culmination; III, Period of Termination, or Decline. "Recovery," he states, "rarely takes place before three or four months."

Thus melancholia, like other feverish conditions of the body — typhoid, for instance — runs its course, and has its definite climax, its critical moment when the patient will either get better or get worse. Furthermore, after the climax of melancholia, as in the case of similar feverish diseases, the patient goes through a period of convalescence. He does not at once become well ("the disappearance of the disease is gradual, not sudden" — Krafft-Ebing), but he at

once becomes much better; and his recovery thereafter proceeds with increasing rapidity.

When we examine Shakespeare's presentation of Hamlet's melancholia we discover that he has nicely portrayed this climax. Hamlet's utter inability to act after the *convincing* evidence of the Mouse-Trap and in the *pat* opportunity shows that the paralysis of his will-power is now virtually complete; his killing of Polonius shows that he has reached a state of furor; and the ugly sentiment he utters over the kneeling Claudius, and the cruel way in which he tortures his mother, show that his mental unwholesomeness has sunk to its lowest depths. All these accumulating symptoms indicate the approach of the climax. Then the sudden appearance of the Ghost, constituting that startling episode with which the dramatist is accustomed to mark the turning-point in his tragedies, denotes the actual arrival of the climax itself.

But the appearance of the Ghost does more than mark in a technical way the turning-point of the play. It helps us to verify our conclusion, arrived at on other grounds, as to the cause of Hamlet's strange inactivity. It shows us that Hamlet, as he frankly confesses, deserves a chiding on the score of purposeless delay; that in so long letting go by his "important" and "dread" duty he has been merely "lapsed in time and passion"; and that in his recent sparing of Claudius he was actuated not by a stout resolution for a more thorough revenge but merely by "blunted purpose."

Still further, the Ghost stops Hamlet in his cruel punishment of his mother. That the elder Hamlet (who, we are told, so loved Gertrude "that he might not beteem the winds of heaven visit her face too roughly") still retained some affection for his erring wife is indicated in various ways. His spirit on its first visit had specially urged Hamlet not to taint his mind against his mother, and under no circumstances contrive any punishment for her; "Leave her to

Heaven," had been its command. And now, in appearing a second time, it exhibits the same consideration for her. According to the belief of Shakespeare's day, a ghost had the power to make itself visible or audible, or both, to one, to several, or to all persons present; readers who are familiar with the early drama will recall many instances of this power exercised by ghosts on the Elizabethan stage. The spirit of the elder Hamlet, knowing that "conceit in weakest bodies strongest works," had chosen to remain invisible and inaudible to Gertrude; and when, in spite of this precaution, she is frightened, is quick to urge Hamlet to reassure her:

> But look! amazement on thy mother sits:
> O step between her and her fighting soul!
> Conceit in weakest bodies strongest works;
> Speak to her, Hamlet.

Perhaps, too, a considerate regard for her distress explains why the Ghost does not further address Hamlet, but at once ends the interview and "steals away" — leaving us with an otherwise unaccountable sense of incompleteness and futility in its visit.

If the appearance of the Ghost marks the climax of Hamlet's melancholia, we should expect to find hereafter an improvement in his condition. And this we observe in his changed attitude toward his mother. He came almost wishing to murder her, determined to be as cruel as he could; and, up to the present, he had been pitiless, furiously wounding her with words. Now, however, he turns to her in an entirely different mood. First assuring her that he is not mad, he appeals to her to save her soul: "Mother, for love of grace" — he raises the issue of salvation; "Confess yourself to Heaven: repent what's past." And so earnestly does he urge her to confession, repentance, and redemption that at last she breaks into tears: "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain" — she confesses her sin, she repents with

tears, and she is ready to live a better life. Hamlet is quick to accept the change:

> O, throw away the worser part of it,
> And live the purer with the other half!

The scene now becomes one of tenderness. Gertrude sits weeping, her head bowed in her hands. That is why Hamlet does all the talking. To his "Good-night" she answers nothing. He looks at her in pity; he cannot leave her so. After giving further advice, he says: "Once more, good-night." Again receiving no response, he makes his first move toward reconciliation: "When you are desirous to be bless'd [that is, when through repentance you seek the blessing of God, and resume the "purer" life], I'll blessing beg of you" — I will come, as a dutiful, affectionate son, and kneel before you, and ask a mother's blessing, in complete reconciliation and loyalty. Still there is no response from her. He changes the topic to Polonius, and explains that he will "answer well the death" he gave him. Gertrude, however, cannot yet speak; she must weep her penitence out.

Hamlet does not wish to leave her in the height of her distress of soul. "Again, good-night," he says; but he does not go. After watching in silence her bowed head, he murmurs to himself: "I must be cruel *only to be kind*." What a different attitude toward her this little aside reveals, and how much more wholesome a condition of mind! He feels that he must do what he can to save her; and, like the surgeon, he must now give pain in order to cure: "One word more — good lady." The sarcasm in the form of address indicates a renewed hardness in his tone, and presages the cruelty to follow.

Gertrude, looking up with tears in her eyes, speaks in utmost humility: "What shall I do?" And here we observe a new attitude on her part — that of a true penitent

seeking aid, and willing to do whatsoever is commanded her.

Whereupon Hamlet, in language so brutal that it must have lacerated his mother's heart, sardonically urges her to return to wallowing in the lechery of the King's bed. And, further, he advises her, "for a pair of reechy kisses," to betray to her paramour the life of her only son; "'Twere good," he says with cutting irony, "you let him know" my great secret, namely "that I essentially am not in madness, but mad in craft." The whole speech is couched in the most insulting terms. Yet Gertrude proves her repentance to be true. With unmistakable affection in her voice she replies:

> Be *thou* assur'd, if words be made of breath,
> And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
> What *thou* hast said to me!

It is an oath ringing with love and sincerity. She promises not to reveal anything to Claudius. And she keeps her promise. From this moment on Hamlet takes her into his confidence, and begins to treat her with something of his old affection. The text of the First Quarto, though of little value for an interpretation of Shakespeare's finished revision, may nevertheless shed some light on the completeness of the reconciliation:

> *Ham.* And, mother, but assist me in revenge,
> And in his death your infamy shall die.
> *Gert.* Hamlet, I vow, by that Sovereignty
> That knows our thoughts and looks into our hearts,
> I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
> What stratagem soe'er thou shalt devise.

Hamlet's new trust in his mother is shown when he confides to her his knowledge of the crafty plans of his enemies in taking him to England, and declares his intention to "delve one yard below their mines, and blow them at the moon." If Gertrude cares to side with the King, she can

reveal to him this important news. But she keeps faith with Hamlet, and conceals everything that might warn Claudius of danger.

Clearly, then, the scene breaks in the middle; up to the appearance of the Ghost, Hamlet is one sort of man, after that appearance, he is a different sort of man — calmer, saner, more wholesome in mood. And, in similar fashion, *the whole play breaks here*; for, as we have said, the coming of the Ghost marks the climax of the plot — the turning-point in the hero's melancholia. From this time on Hamlet is increasingly better. He begins to display more interest in life, he takes on a more hopeful attitude towards the world, his thinking loses much of its morbid quality, and his confidence in human nature is in part restored. The change taking place within him appears in the return of his sense of humor; we find him jesting with the Clown in the graveyard, and making good-natured, almost hilarious, fun of the dandified "water-fly" Osric. At the same time his energy shows unmistakable signs of recovery from its long paralysis. He is alert to the danger of setting foot on English soil, and with firm resolution plans and executes his escape from the clutches of his enemy. In the face of the pirate attack, he rallies the sailors and leads the boarding-party. Later he engineers his release from the pirates, and returns to oppose a crafty and powerful villain, who, he knows, is determined to kill him. More important still, he feels absolute confidence in his ability to execute — and promptly — his great task: "The time will be short," he says; "the interim is mine." All these things indicate that the dark cloud of melancholia which we saw descend upon him at the beginning of the play is rapidly lifting. In the final scenes of the play — as in the jesting with Osric, or in the friendly fencing contest with Laertes — his melancholia has almost disappeared.

Yet the recovery comes just too late to save him. Shake-

speare is fond of thus building up in our minds a "false hope," to be crossed by chance immediately before the catastrophe. In the last Act of *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, many forces are exerting themselves to save the lovers; yet these forces are overcome by a malicious Fate. When Romeo arrives at the tomb, Friar Laurence is hurrying to inform him of the situation; had the old friar not stumbled and fallen he would have arrived in time to avert disaster. Even as Romeo makes his preparations to drain off the vial of poison, and begins to take his farewell of Juliet, the sleeping-potion is rapidly losing its power. He is astonished at the red blood flooding her cheeks, and exclaims:

> O my love! my wife!
> Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
> Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.
> Thou are not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet
> Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks!

We know what the crimson in her lips and cheeks means — that in a moment she will stir to life, rise, and speak. Yet her recovery comes too late; and Romeo drains off the poison just before the opiate spends its force and Juliet opens her eyes. So in *King Lear*, the faithful Edgar, running at full speed, arrives too late — soon enough, indeed, to save old Lear from hanging, and to cut down the warm body of Cordelia while signs of life are still apparent, but not soon enough to avert the tragedy. And in *Othello* Emilia rushes with the news that will save Desdemona and Othello. She actually knocks on the bedroom door at the very instant the Moor places the pillow over the head of his wife — but again too late to check the course of disaster. By such a method Shakespeare is accustomed to produce in his audience the effects of pity and fear.

Naturally we may expect the same general method in the present tragedy. And we find it in the lifting of Hamlet's

melancholia — a change, however, that comes too late to avert the catastrophe.

Another point needs parenthetic comment. At the end of the scene Hamlet grasps the body of Polonius, and starts out with the words: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room." Yet some persons, in their effort to explain the play, say that Hamlet failed to take revenge on Claudius because he had such a delicate, sensitive, almost sentimental nature, that he could not bear the thought of shedding blood. The line just quoted shows that whatever else Hamlet might be, he was not a sentimentalist. As an experienced soldier he was accustomed to bloodshed; he had no compunctions at sending Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death; and he did not — nor did the dramatist and his audience — live in an age when sentimentality of this kind flourished. But to Shakespeare's effective handling of the so-called "sentimental theory" nothing need be added.

Act III, Scene v

In modern reprints of the play, this scene is regularly made to open Act IV. But since all the original editions — the First Quarto, the Second Quarto, and the Folio — fail to indicate act, or even scene, divisions, we are under no obligation to perpetuate the blunder of a later edition. Working, apparently, by rule of thumb, and assuming that Act III was now long enough, an unintelligent printer in 1676 jotted down here the notation "Act IV, Scene I." A fresh act-division at this point, however, is most unfortunate. The Mouse-Trap scene, the Prayer scene, the Closet scene, the present scene, and the three following scenes, all constitute an uninterrupted chain of events, the several episodes of which swiftly move in a strict causal and temporal order. Indeed, so closely linked are the episodes that it is possible to conceive of them as making up one single scene, extending

from shortly before midnight until dawn. Thereafter, with Hamlet's voyage to England, comes a considerable lapse of time — several weeks — followed by another and a totally different sequence of events. Shakespeare naturally would place so important and significant a break in time between acts — as he does, for instance, between Act I and Act II, where two months elapse. Moreover, since in the Elizabethan theater the pauses between acts often were long, and were attended by music and the serving of refreshments to the audience, it is inconceivable that the dramatist would in such fashion interrupt a continuous flow of action. Accordingly I have deferred the beginning of a new act until the end of the closely-knit and rapidly-moving events that make up what has been appropriately termed "this grand night."

The present scene, it will be observed, immediately follows the exit of Hamlet with the body of Polonius. While he is engaged in hiding the body, the Queen is asked by Claudius to explain the cause of her "profound heaves" (the after-effects of her penitential weeping), and is called upon to report what the spying-trap had revealed. Will she give away Hamlet's important secret, or is she to keep her promise to him? Instantly we get the answer in her emphatic "Mad as the sea and wind!"

Hamlet had correctly judged her: his secret is safe in her hands. We feel that, could he have heard her reply to Claudius, he would have been gratified. And she goes even further. In an effort to protect Hamlet she tries to excuse his killing of Polonius. She plausibly explains it as a pure accident, namely that Hamlet, hearing something stir behind the arras, assumed that it was a rat (a very natural assumption, since rats were frequently heard behind the hangings of Elizabethan rooms), and under this false "apprehension" unluckily killed "the unseen good old man." The blame — in so far as there was any blame — is thus

shifted from Hamlet's shoulders to those of the eavesdropping Polonius. "Where is he gone?" demands the King. And again we find Gertrude loyally defending her son:

> To draw apart the body he hath killed;
> O'er whom his very madness, like some ore
> Among a mineral of metals base,
> Shows itself pure; he weeps for what is done.

The way in which Hamlet "wept" was: "I'll lug the guts into the neighbor room." Thus his mother lies in order to protect him. She had sworn not to reveal anything she had learned; and she keeps her promise. She does not even remotely hint that Hamlet is "mad in craft" and cunningly bent on revenge, or that he is suspicious of Claudius' purpose in sending him to England and will hoist the engineer "with his own petar." She fails to give the King the least warning of danger.

Act III, Scene vi

Scene vi immediately follows. Just as Hamlet murmurs "safely bestowed," Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as commanded by the King, rush in and try to learn where he has concealed the body. Hamlet, aware that on his coming voyage to England he will have to outwit these two young men, makes a set effort to convince them of his lunacy — the first time in the play he really attempts to convince others of his madness, or to put that madness to a practical use. As a climax to his antic talk, he cries: "Hide, fox! and after, all!" — an old child's game, now called "Follow the leader" — and dodging about in a way very silly in a grown man, runs off the stage with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in undignified pursuit.

ACT III, SCENE VII

Scene VII, like the three preceding scenes, follows without an appreciable lapse of time. The King is awaiting the return of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern ("I pray you, haste in this") with information as to where the body has been hidden. Though badly frightened, he says:

> Yet must not we put the strong law on him;
> He's lov'd of the distracted multitude.

It is significant that in several passages Shakespeare stresses the fact that Hamlet is personally loved by the common people — is, indeed, the popular if not national hero. Later Claudius says:

> Why to a public count I might not go
> Is the great love the general gender bear him.

And the Clown in the graveyard seems to give further testimony to the affection the people of Denmark have for their young Prince: "Can not you tell that? Every fool can tell that; it was the very day that young Hamlet was born."

Yet some critics, in their effort to explain the play, say that Hamlet delays in his revenge because the deed is to him exceedingly dangerous, and he is constrained first to assure his personal safety. That hypothesis Shakespeare confutes in several ways. The Danes, he tells us, "make mows" at Claudius, whereas they "love" Hamlet even to the extent of "dipping all his faults in their affection." Further, they are so "distracted" at the course events have taken that they are, as Claudius himself admits, "ripe for revolt." Laertes, weak as he is, can lead them in a mob to batter down the King's doors. But we need not labor the point. All the evidence shows that "fear for personal safety" cannot be accepted as the explanation of Hamlet's long delay. His difficulty is *internal*, not external.

When the Prince, under guard for the first time, is led

before the King, he continues — what he had begun in the preceding scene — a shrewd feint of madness. Heretofore he had played his lunatic part carelessly, using it mainly as an outlet for his irritability; but now he goes about it with an unmistakable effort at deception. He had said to his mother: "It shall go hard but I will delve one yard below their mines"; already he is at work. As we observe the deliberate craft with which he acts his antic part, we feel that he has made progress in the recovery of energy; and as he goes out exclaiming "Come! for England!" we entertain no fear as to his ability to save himself from the machinations of his enemies.

Act III, Scene viii

The foregoing scene ended with Hamlet's shout "Come! for England!"; the present scene shows us Hamlet on his way thither — the logical culmination of the events that have been moving so rapidly since the midnight presentation of the Mouse-Trap.

As he walks toward the harbor in the gray morning hours, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and servants carrying luggage, he sees a newly landed body of Norwegian troops, marching with drums beating and colors flying. In surprise he halts one of the officers to ask: "Whose forces are these?"

And thus Shakespeare brings to our attention a person for whom he had carefully prepared us at the beginning of the play — young Fortinbras. Why did he fetch into the story this foreign prince, who has nothing to do with events in Denmark, and still less with the domestic tragedy enacting within the walls of its royal palace? The plot, obviously, does not need him; and ordinarily in modern stagings of the play his part is entirely omitted. Yet Shakespeare had an important reason for creating him: in his anxiety to make us

understand the hero — whose strange behavior constitutes the main interest of the play — he devised Fortinbras as a "foil" to Hamlet. And since the effectiveness of a foil is heightened by similarity, he made Fortinbras in numerous respects almost exactly like Hamlet. Both are young men of approximately the same age, and both are princes of their respective countries — neighboring countries. Each bears the name of his father, of the elder Hamlet and the elder Fortinbras; each has lost his father, and each has had his uncle set above him on the throne. Both are sons of "very warlike" kings; both were reared in a like atmosphere of martial activity; and both are distinguished as soldiers. Certainly these points of similarity are striking enough to render conspicuous any difference in the behavior of the two young princes.

And when we turn to that side of the picture we find a difference that is hardly less than amazing. Fortinbras, without any special task and without any reason to "stir," is constantly *doing*; Hamlet, with an "important" task and with every reason to "stir," is continually *moping* like a John-a-dreams. The contrast is so obvious — "gross as earth," admits Hamlet — that even he who runs may read. Shakespeare could not have made his point plainer.

Further, we note that this is the second foil he has created for the hero. There is, however, an important difference between the functions served by the quiet Horatio and the impetuous Fortinbras. Horatio is a foil to Hamlet's temperament; Hamlet by nature is sensitive and emotional, and Horatio, with his thick-skinned, phlegmatic disposition, emphasizes these qualities. Fortinbras, on the other hand, is a foil not to Hamlet's inborn temperament, a thing permanent in his being, but to his temporary and altogether abnormal state of inactivity. As the personification of red-blooded health in all its exuberant energy, the Norwegian prince shows us what we might expect from the Danish

prince if some illness of mind had not transformed him — to his own astonishment and to the astonishment of every one else — into "a dull and muddy-mettled rascal," a veritable "peasant slave," who, when faced with a most important and sacred task involving affection and honor, becomes "lapsed in time and passion."

In the present scene Fortinbras supplies us with an illustration, as it were, of the normal behavior of healthy youth. Through sheer excess of animal spirits he has raised an army out of "lawless resolutes," inducing them to serve only for "food and diet," and has embarked on an arduous campaign — without provocation, and all "for nothing"; whereas Hamlet, in a great and imperative duty, urged on by the piteous appeal of a "dear father" and by every consideration of personal honor, has done nothing. The contrast does not escape Hamlet; indeed, it is so painful to him that he hurries all from the stage in order to seek relief for his emotions.

The soliloquy that follows has a special significance in that it gives us our first glimpse into Hamlet's mind after the climax of his melancholia. We should, therefore, expect now to find in him less fury of words, less sickly thinking, a more wholesome attitude toward the world, and, possibly, a clearer insight into his own condition. In judging these matters, luckily we are able to compare the present soliloquy, uttered *on the day after the climax*, with that earlier soliloquy, uttered *on the day before the climax*. The two are exactly parallel in situation, and are similar in their development of thought. Each springs from Hamlet's having had suddenly forced upon him, by a striking example, a realization of his shameful inactivity — in the first instance by the player ("Is it not monstrous that this player here"), in the second instance by Fortinbras ("How all occasions do inform against me"). Each soliloquy begins with self-denunciation at his inactivity; then seeks — in vain — for the cause of

that inactivity; and, finally, each ends in a resolve for the future. Thus a comparison of the two soliloquies should enable us to estimate with some accuracy the change that has taken place in the hero's condition.

Though he now starts, as he did in the earlier soliloquy, with self-reproach, he speaks calmly, and makes a well-reasoned examination of his behavior. There is no passion, no disgust at the world, no thought of suicide, no effort to evade blame, and, most important of all, no seeking for an excuse to delay further. He first views his problem in general terms. The man, he observes, who lets go by important acting in a case involving affection and honor is like a beast, a stall-fed ox that lives only to feed and sleep. But man, he declares, was created superior to the beast; and it is inconceivable that when the Divine Being endowed us with the power of "looking before and after," and with that essentially Godlike quality of reason, He intended those capabilities to "fust in us unused." In matters of duty, therefore, no excuse can be found for inactivity. And this conclusion, established by inescapable logic, Hamlet applies to his own behavior. Why does he, charged with a duty of the most sacred kind, involving filial love and personal honor, merely "sleep and feed"?

In reply to this question he suggests two possible answers: either he suffers from "bestial oblivion" — the thing he has just been talking about; or, mainly through cowardice, he has the trick of "thinking too precisely on the event," with the result that "resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Of these two possible answers, the first, we know, is merely self-denunciation inspired by contempt at his delay. Hamlet — as the rest of the soliloquy shows — was generously endowed with affection and with a sense of honor. That he so keenly longs to do his duty proves as much; for if he suffered from "bestial oblivion" he would not be disturbed by his failure to act. The second answer,

likewise, with its self-depreciative emphasis on cowardice, does not reach the true cause of his trouble. Yet, although it fails to diagnose the *cause*, it describes well enough the chief *symptom* — namely, that when called upon to *act*, he resorts to *thinking*: "About, my brain!"; "That would be scanned." As Régis puts it, "every effort is concentrated in the mental domain." Thus Hamlet sees *how* he behaves; but *why* he should so behave, why all his energy should expend itself in mental instead of physical activity, he is quite unable to fathom. Frankly he declares:

> I do not know
> Why yet I live to say "This thing's to do."

The melancholic man, of course, cannot explain his condition; if he could clearly understand himself, his melancholia would disappear.

Precisely this makes the play obscure; for since Hamlet, who alone is aware that he is delaying, does not know the cause, he cannot inform us; and hence the author, who as a dramatic artist must speak through his characters, cannot inform us — at least in so many words. That is why we see Shakespeare laboring so hard with soliloquies, and foils, and other devices to make clear his purpose. And obviously he expects us, by interpreting the evidence thus abundantly spread before us, to arrive at an understanding of the play.

In the present scene he frankly challenges our intelligence. He makes Hamlet frame for us the big question of the delay — "Why this thing's to do," and in the same breath supply the conditions that must control our answer — "since I have *cause*, and *will*, and *strength*, and *means* to do it." Hamlet has, indeed, abundant "cause": his "dear father murdered," his mother "seduced," his crown "stolen," and his beloved people of Denmark abused. Further, he has the "will" — that is, the "desire" — to do the deed. How much he longs to act is shown by the bitter self-denunciation of all the

soliloquies. And he has the "strength" to do it. For him the task holds no external difficulties; intellectually he is more than a match for his uncle, and he is firmly entrenched in the loves of the people. He never gives a single thought to possible danger resulting from the deed. Finally, he has the "means" — that is, the "opportunities" — to do it. At all times he has access to the King's presence; he can even enter Claudius' bed-chamber after midnight. Yet, in spite of great cause, full desire, ample strength, and abundant opportunities, he has for more than two months been quite unable to act. And in answer to the question "Why?" he frankly admits "I do not know."

In these few lines Shakespeare sums up the whole problem, and — as is unavoidable — places the burden of solution upon our shoulders. What, we are called upon to answer, will explain Hamlet's strange lack of energy, and at the same time satisfy the four limiting conditions imposed? Our reply has already been formulated; the dramatist himself suggested it when he first introduced to us the hero as suffering from melancholia. But our confidence in the correctness of our solution ought now to be fortified, for only melancholia, with its continued paralysis of will-power, explains Hamlet's utter lack of energy in spite of great cause, full desire, ample strength, and abundant opportunities. In addition it explains, naturally and perfectly, his strange mental condition — weariness of life, disgust at the world, the suicidal impulse, irritability, moodiness, morbidness of ideas, too much thinking, and so on. And finally, but not least important, it explains his inability to understand himself.

Continuing his soliloquy, Hamlet compares his dull inactivity with the spectacular activity of Fortinbras. He raises the question, What is real greatness? And he answers this question in two ways. "Rightly to be great," he declares, is "not to stir without great argument." One should

exercise restraint, and resort to violence only when the cause is adequate to justify such procedure. Yet, he promptly adds, the truly great man will "find quarrel in a straw when *honor's* at the stake." Hamlet then applies these two tests to himself, and finds himself condemned on both scores: "How stand I, then, that have a father killed [great cause], a mother stained [honor at the stake]," the one supplying excitement to "my reason" ("Prompted to my revenge by Heaven and Hell"), the other to "my blood" ("Duller should'st thou be than the fat weed that roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf would'st thou not stir in this!"). And having now, intellectually at least, cleared up the issue involved, he ends with the resolution:

> O, from this time forth,
> My thoughts be *bloody* — or be *nothing worth.*

Obviously the soliloquy reflects a healthier state of mind. There is very little trace of melancholia in it, and the sentiment is in the main what we should expect from a normal Hamlet. Instead of confusing the problem, he clarifies it; instead of offering excuses or devising reasons for further delay, he views his task with a level eye. He had already declared that his trouble was "thinking too precisely on the event"; now he resolves that no longer shall his enterprise be sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought — such as "the Ghost may be the devil" or "I will wait for a more thorough revenge." From this time forth his "thoughts" must take on the ruddy hue of blood — or be "nothing worth."

ACT IV

Scene I

It is Shakespeare's custom to allow a certain amount of time to elapse after the Third Act in order that the climax may work its effect upon the character of the hero; and evi-

dence shows that not a little time passes before we enter upon the stirring and swiftly-moving events that form the concluding chapter of the story. Polonius, we learn, had been buried in great secrecy; but the news of his murder had leaked out, with the result that the common people, already ripe for revolt against Claudius, had become "muddied, thick, and unwholesome in their thoughts and whispers for good Polonius' death." At last, by means of letters, or possibly by a messenger, these rumors had reached Laertes in Paris; and he had returned to Elsinore, where he was keeping himself locked at home "in clouds." The ship that was carrying Hamlet to England, after its encounter with the pirates, had proceeded to its destination; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, delivering to the English sovereign the substituted letter, had been put to death; and special ambassadors sent to inform Claudius of the fact are on the point of landing in Elsinore. Fortinbras had led his army into Poland, had there conducted a successful campaign, and now is passing through Denmark on his way homeward. All these events clearly indicate the lapse of several weeks.

During these weeks nothing of importance has occurred at the Court of Denmark. But at last there comes a day crowded with sensational happenings, which constitutes Act IV; immediately followed by a still more lurid day, which constitutes Act V, and brings the play to its tragic end.

The dramatist, in order to prepare us for the approaching catastrophe, starts the final series of episodes by striking a note of pathos. Ophelia comes before us, hair disheveled, lute in hand, speaking incoherently and singing snatches of old songs. The crushing blows that had fallen upon her — the loss of her lover, the loss of her father, and, worst of all, the murder of her father by her lover — had finally proved more than her weak nature could bear, and her mind had given way.

Shakespeare pictures her madness not as something humorous, for that would be an artistic blunder, but as something pathetic and even pretty —

> Thought, and affliction, passion, hell itself
> She turns to favour and to prettiness.

Further, she blends in her incoherent utterances and pathetic snatches of song the two great causal forces that led to her madness: the death of her aged father, and the loss of her lover. Thus, one moment she will sing:

> *How should I your true love know*
> *From another one?*

the next moment, in altered mood:

> *He is dead and gone, lady,*
> *He is dead and gone.*

Again, merrily:

> *For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy!*

followed immediately by:

> *His beard was as white as snow,*
> *All flaxen was his poll;*
> *He is gone, he is gone!*

And, finally, with a daring justified only by its absolute trueness to life, he accentuates the pathos by making the pure and innocent Ophelia mingle with her insanity an element of the obscene. The immodesty of some of the songs she sings — which, we feel, never would have escaped her lips while she was mistress of herself — is touching in the mute evidence it gives to her utter unconsciousness of what she is saying. On this point Strachey writes:

> If we bear in mind the notorious fact that, in the dreadful visitation of mental derangement, delicate and refined women will use language so coarse that it is difficult to guess where they could ever have even heard such words, and certain that wherever heard

they would have always lain, unknown of, and innocuous, in the mind, unless the hotbed of mental fever had quickened them for the first time into life; — if we remember this fact, and couple it with the consideration that the infant ears of the motherless Ophelia might have heard the talk and the songs of such a nurse as that of Juliet, we shall find nothing improbable, nor even unseemly, in the poor girl's songs — not only nothing to disturb our faith in the unsullied purity of her maiden mind, but nothing to cloud the bright beauty of that purity with even the slightest passing breath.

How effective this conception of Ophelia's madness is, any one who has seen it on the stage can testify. Even the hard-hearted Claudius is moved to pity.

Next, in preparation for a new episode, the stage is cleared of all persons save Claudius and Gertrude. While the two are in confidential talk, they are suddenly startled by a violent noise within of heavy footsteps and clashing weapons. The Swiss guards are overpowered, the doors to the King's private chamber are crashed in, and through the broken portal appears Laertes with a riotous mob of Danes at his back. Placing himself squarely before the King, and threateningly lifting his sword, he shouts: "Where is my father?" —

> How came he dead? I'll not be juggled with.
> To hell, allegiance! Vows, to the blackest devil!
> Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
> I dare damnation! To this point I stand —
> That both the worlds I give to negligence!
> Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged,
> Most thoroughly, for my father!

All allegiance to the throne, all vows of loyalty to his King, all questions of right or wrong, all hope of eternal salvation, he hurls into the profoundest pit of hell; daringly he faces destruction of himself in both this present world and the future world. On one point alone he stands — he will be revenged, and "most thoroughly," for the death of *his* father.

Why this startling episode, rendered emphatic by its unexpectedness and violence? The answer is not hard to find: Shakespeare has merely created yet another foil to the hero. Here is action! Further, here is the *very* action that Hamlet had been called upon to do — to avenge a murdered father. The task that he was unable to perform is placed upon the shoulders of the weakest young man in the play, with a result hardly less than astounding. Laertes, in order to avenge his father, hurries from a foreign country, raises a mob of common people, overpowers the Swiss guards, batters down the doors to the royal presence, stands with sword lifted over Claudius' head, and shouts with no uncertain resolution: "I'll be revenged, most thoroughly, for *my* father!" And thus Shakespeare would say to us: Here is the natural, the spontaneous reaction of any normal son, even a weakling like Laertes; compare his behavior with Hamlet's, and answer the question why Hamlet could not act with the like energy.

A foil, as we saw in the case of Fortinbras, must present certain features of similarity in order to render the contrast effective. The points of likeness between Hamlet and Laertes, again, are unusually striking. Both are young men of approximately the same age; both were reared at the same Court, under the same standards; both are only sons; both have a father murdered; both regard revenge as a sacred duty; both find the object of their revenge in one and the same man — Claudius; and both, in opposing the King, face the same external difficulties.

The rest is all contrast. Hamlet is a "soldier," already famed for acts of daring; Laertes is a fop "of very soft society," who spends his time treading the primrose path of dalliance; Hamlet possesses a keen and powerful intellect, much more than a match for that of Claudius and the courtiers; Laertes is intellectually weak, and has to work without the advantage of brains; Hamlet, as the Prince and

Heir Apparent resident in the palace, has supplied to him abundant opportunities for killing the King; Laertes has to create an opportunity by overpowering the Swiss guards and beating down doors that swing freely before Hamlet; Hamlet's father was a noble man, with such godlike qualities that his foul and treacherous murder seemed to cry out to heaven for revenge; Laertes' father was a meddlesome, spying fool, whose accidental death was more or less deserved; finally, Hamlet was urged forward to his revenge "by heaven and hell," by a personal visit from his father's spirit uttering both a "dread command" and a heart-moving appeal; Laertes, on the other hand, had nothing to prompt him — save the natural instincts of any normal son. And what of the result? Hamlet, after more than two months, has done nothing; Laertes, with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love, sweeps from a distant country, and with irresistible energy forces his way through every obstacle until, with sword poised, he stands before the King himself.

Shakespeare's use of this daring foil reveals his anxiety to render the play clear. But if we are to get the full import of its meaning, we must study it in connection with the Fortinbras-foil that immediately precedes, and with the situation that evokes them both. Hamlet in soliloquy comes before us saying: "Why can I not act?" and despairingly exclaims: "I do not know." Shakespeare, being thus unable to answer the big question of the play in a direct way, is compelled to resort to an indirect method. He first states the limiting conditions to which a correct answer must conform — great cause, full desire, ample strength, abundant opportunities. Then he promptly shows how other young men of Hamlet's age and general station in life behave. Had he illustrated with the case of one young man only, we might regard that case as exceptional; but by immediately repeating the illustration in the case of another — and

weaker — young man, he gives universality to the energetic behavior of youth. At the same time he makes Fortinbras exemplify the behavior of a young man of Hamlet's *exact rank*, and Laertes, of a young man in Hamlet's *exact situation*. By these means he shows us that Hamlet was in an *abnormal* condition, not only unlike his original self but unlike *all* other young men: he lacks the energy of a Fortinbras "to stir without great cause" (indeed, he cannot stir with great cause); and he lacks the energy of a Laertes "greatly to find quarrel in a straw when honor's at the stake." More illustration would be useless, less would not be clear. Now, asks the dramatist of us in the only way available to him, what abnormal state — produced by events narrated early in the play, and satisfying the four limiting conditions — causes in Hamlet this strange paralysis of will-power?

But we must return to the scene under consideration. The crafty Claudius smiles upon Laertes — for a man may smile and smile, and be a villain — and begins to bend him to his stronger will. He cannot do this with Hamlet, whose keen intellect invariably puts him to rout; but he easily gains a mastery over the weak Laertes.

To close the scene, the dramatist again fetches in Ophelia with lute in hand, singing snatches of old songs. By this means he strikes anew the note of pity and rearouses in our minds a well-defined fear of the oncoming catastrophe.

In Laertes' tears — manly tears which he could not suppress — and in his expressions of grief obviously uttered with trembling lips, we observe the depth and tenderness of his love for his sister. Inevitably our attitude toward him undergoes a change: his courageous attempt to avenge his father, and his overwhelming love for his sister greatly raise him in our opinion. And as we begin to like him we begin to lose some of our sympathy with Hamlet, who has allowed himself to be carried away from Elsinore and his important task, and is at this moment we know not where.

ACT IV, SCENE II

In Scene II Horatio receives a letter from Hamlet conveying the news that he is again in Denmark. Shakespeare permits us to read the letter itself in order that we may judge for ourselves of the hero's present condition. The thing that most impresses us — the thing that the dramatist emphasizes — is Hamlet's energy in dealing with the pirates. His behavior in leading the attack against them, his courageous boarding their ship single-handed, and his success in winning their favor and negotiating his release, surprise and gratify us; for in these bits of healthy action we discover a reappearance of his older and normal self. Moreover, the ringing confidence with which he writes, and the boldness with which he returns to face Claudius, who, he well knows, is bent upon his instant destruction, make us hope that now at last he can carry out his desired act.

At the close of the scene, Horatio, as urged by Hamlet ("repair thou to me with as much speed as" . . .), hurries away with the sailors to the pirates' hiding-place. It should be noted that he leaves Elsinore before the death of Ophelia, and hence cannot inform Hamlet of that event.

ACT IV, SCENE III

Claudius has just finished assuring Laertes of his innocence in the death of Polonius. With no mention of extenuating circumstances, he has fastened the deed upon the absent Hamlet, representing it as murder, and pointing out that he himself has been in much peril from the same source. When Laertes asks why Hamlet was not punished for "feats so crimeful and so capital in nature," Claudius cites as reasons the affection Gertrude has for her son, and the "great love the general gender" bear to their Prince. Laertes grants the validity of the King's reasons, but de-

clares: Though *you* may be thus prevented from laying violent hands on him, *I* am not; and you may be sure that "my revenge will come." Claudius smilingly winks his eye: "Break not your sleeps for *that*." And, as his mind dwells on the clever trap he had devised for making away with his nephew, his vanity — reflected in the use of the royal plural — leads him to boast:

> You must not think
> That we are made of stuff so flat and dull
> That we can let our beard be shook with danger
> And think it pastime!

And, again winking, he mysteriously adds: "You shortly shall hear more."

Instantly there enters a messenger with a letter from Hamlet.

The King is astonished. Nervously opening the letter, he reads aloud the sarcastic address: "High and Mighty"; and with increasing uneasiness he continues: "To-morrow shall I beg leave to see your *kingly eyes* [more sarcasm]; when I shall — first asking your pardon thereunto — recount the occasions of my sudden and *more strange* return." The letter ends brusquely "Hamlet," without the usual complimentary close. Claudius is badly frightened. He looks at Laertes, and resolves — for no time is to be lost — to make a tool out of this weakling.

As was his custom, he begins with flattery. "Laertes," he says in effect, "we have been hearing wonderful news of you from Paris. In particular we have been given to understand that you are a remarkably expert fencer. In fact, we have been told that as a duelist you have no equal — even in France. There was a famous French swordsman recently at Elsinore who praised your skill, especially with the rapier [the most deadly of weapons], to the skies." Laertes swallows all this — bait, hook, and sinker. Whereupon

Claudius heaps upon him even more fulsome flattery. And then, having puffed him full of conceit, he introduces a shrewdly devised lie, namely that Hamlet, upon hearing these wonderful reports, was so envenomed with envy that "he could nothing do but wish and beg" for Laertes' instant recall from Paris to fence with him.

"Now, out of this, ——" says Claudius; and pauses. He looks questioningly at Laertes, until in embarrassment the latter is forced to ask: "What out of this, my lord?" But instead of answering, Claudius begins to stir up Laertes' passions: "Laertes, was your father dear to you?"

When at last Laertes' hatred has been fanned to the highest pitch, Claudius unfolds the treacherous scheme. Under the guise of friendship, a fencing-match is to be arranged in which Laertes is to use a rapier unprotected with any "button" on the point, and hence as dangerous as it would be in actual warfare, whereas Hamlet will use an ordinary foil. This treachery, says the King, will be easy to effect, because Hamlet is himself so "generous and free from all contriving" that it never would occur to him to suspect in others conduct so ignoble.

In this passage the dramatist has again pointed out, and in an unmistakable way, the tragic flaw in the hero — a form of idealism too lofty for the uses of this world. It was the cause of his disillusionment at the beginning of the play, and of his resultant melancholia; and now at the end of the play it leads to his death. Had he been less of an idealist there would have been no tragedy in Elsinore.

Claudius, basing his cowardly plan on Hamlet's essential nobility of character, asks Laertes: "Will you do this?" Without a moment's hesitation that young man answers: "I will do it"; he is easier than Claudius thought him. Indeed, he goes farther than Claudius, and suggests an even more ignoble trick. He proposes — as if facing the friendly and unsuspecting Hamlet with a bare rapier were not

enough — to smear his weapon's point with a poison so mortal that nothing "can save the thing from death that is but scratched withal." Claudius, now encouraged in his villainous plotting, adds yet another device — for he wishes to make absolutely sure of his nephew's murder: he will prepare a cup of poison so strong that Hamlet "but sipping" thereof cannot possibly escape death. Thus, unless the unforeseen happens, the young Prince, too noble-minded to suspect others of conduct so dishonorable, will fall before a triple-barbed plot — with a naked rapier through his body, with deadly venom coursing his veins, and with poisoned drink "corroding all within." A more cowardly or dastardly plan could hardly be conceived; yet to it Laertes fully and heartily agrees.

The skillful way in which the character of Laertes has been handled demands comment. For a short time, in order to use him as a foil, and in order to increase the pathos of Ophelia's madness, Shakespeare has allowed him to behave in a way that commands our admiration. His courageous effort to avenge his father, and his tender affection for his sister, ennoble him in our esteem; further, in his splendid show of activity he begins to reflect discredit upon Hamlet. We feel that possibly we have misjudged him, and find ourselves taking a genuine interest in him. But the dramatist cannot permit this. The audience must not lose sympathy with Hamlet, nor may its attention for a moment be distracted by a rival hero. Two men cannot be allowed in the "spotlight"; this is a one-man play. Therefore Shakespeare quickly disposes of our newly developed liking: with one deft stroke he wipes Laertes's good character from the slate. We discover that we had not misjudged him, and that Hamlet alone deserves our sympathy. And here we should note how Shakespeare handles the two other foils, Horatio and Fortinbras. Both are kept well in the background. Save for one brief scene of seven lines, we meet

Fortinbras only after Hamlet is dead; and, though Horatio is often on the stage, he is not allowed to do anything, or even to say much.

The crafty plotting of Claudius is interrupted by the entrance of Gertrude to announce the suicide of Ophelia. Shakespeare thus closes the Fourth Act by again striking a note of pathos, this time more insistently; and, with the death of one of the main characters, he warns us in an unmistakable way that the play can end only in catastrophe. We vaguely realize that some inexorable power, not unlike Fate, has death-marked the hero, who now must move, if slowly yet surely, to his destruction. And so the dramatist begins with subtle art gradually to heighten the essentially tragic emotions of pity and fear.

ACT V

SCENE I

Act V opens in the churchyard at Elsinore with preparations for the burial of Ophelia. As the "clowns" — for so the grave-diggers are called — begin broad jesting, we realize, not perhaps without astonishment, that Shakespeare is to lead up to the final horror by means of a wild burst of humor. What is his artistic justification for this?

In order properly to answer the question we must consider the grounds on which he regularly introduces humor into his tragedies. It is generally said that he employs humor in order to give his audience emotional relief from tense situations — and this relief might be, as in the present case, anticipatory. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that relief is the only or even the chief effect that he aims at. All artists — and the dramatist quite as much as, let us say, the painter — know the value of contrast. Often in a picture of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child the old masters of Italy present beauty of face and sweetness of char-

acter in the most etherealized form, while in the background they place the ugly, coarse faces of the shepherds and the more or less grotesque figures of the ox and the ass. In a similar way Shakespeare may use the comic in order to make the tragic stand out in bolder relief.

Further, the necessity of working his effects upon a large crowd of people requires that the dramatist be a practical psychologist; and as a practical psychologist he may employ laughter to "touch off" tears, for the two are closely allied. Every successful platform-lecturer knows that the easiest way to make an assemblage weep is first to make it laugh. The reason is simple: persons invariably resist, and usually are able to suppress, the "softer" or sentimental emotions (altruistic in nature), whereas they are always ready to give themselves up freely to the comic emotions (egoistical in nature). This fact may be of value to the playwright. By throwing the members of his audience into laughter he temporarily destroys their emotional equilibrium, and while they are thus "off their poise," so to speak, he can readily switch them into unrepressed pity. Shakespeare, with his shrewd knowledge of human nature, understood this, and accordingly uses humor as an emotional preparation for pathos.

He fully realized, however, that in bringing humor into his tragedies he was running counter to the theory of dramatic art held by some of the best scholars and critics of his day. These men, writing primarily under the influence of Seneca and of the Italian interpreters of the classics, maintained that the dramatic artist should preserve a "unity of effect," and that, accordingly, there should be in tragedy no humor at all. To them the comic note seemed a discord that could not be harmonized with pity and fear. Shakespeare was in large measure sympathetic with this generally-accepted theory; and he yielded to its logic, not by rejecting humor entirely, but by so qualifying his humor as to render

it harmonious with the dominant tragic note. We have an excellent example of his method in *King Lear*, where the Fool, who supplies the comic element, is represented as a sickly lad pining away with grief at the loss of Cordelia, and as the "companion in suffering" of the old King — even in the terrible storm-scenes. The Fool is a pathetic as well as a comic creation. We find the same skillful tempering of humor in the Porter scene of *Macbeth*. The Porter, in his drunkenness, takes Dunsinane Castle (where the inhuman murder of Duncan has just been committed) to be Hell, the portal (through which Duncan had recently entered, and through which Banquo is seeking entrance) to be Hell Gate, and the keepers of the castle (Macbeth and Lady Macbeth) to be black devils. The humor is thus qualified by tragic irony.

The humor of the present scene is qualified in somewhat the same way. The "clowns" are grave-diggers, the place is a graveyard, the occasion is a burial, and the jests deal with skulls and dead men's bones. All these details give to the comic note a gruesome quality that makes upon the audience a deep impression. But gruesomeness is not the only device used by the artist to temper the humor. The grave the clowns are digging is Ophelia's grave; and the young man who so light-heartedly bandies wit over that grave is one who loved Ophelia with a love greater than that of "forty thousand brothers," and who, we should remember, was the ultimate cause of her madness and suicide. That he is entirely ignorant of her tragic death, and unaware that the grave is being prepared for her, makes the situation intensely pathetic. What a terrible jest Fate, grinning in the background, is having at the expense of the chief jester!

Thus the humor of the graveyard scene is not pure humor, such as the dramatist gives us in a Dogberry or a Falstaff; gruesome, pathetic, and tragic elements insistently mingle

with the comic. Like a great musician, Shakespeare has made apparent discords blend in a harmony that is thereby the richer and fuller.

The first part of the scene is developed in a spirit of broad comedy. Its nature can best be illustrated by citing an early traditional representation of the behavior of the clowns, which seems to go back at least to the days of Betterton and Davenant if not to the age of Elizabeth. A Frenchman has recorded this representation for us as follows:

> After beginning their labor and breaking ground for a grave, a conversation begins between the two grave-diggers; — the chief one takes off his coat, folds it carefully, and puts it by in a safe corner; then, taking up his pickax, spits in his hand, gives a stroke or two, talks, stops, strips off his waistcoat, still talking, folds it with great deliberation and nicety, and puts it with the coat; then an under-waistcoat, still talking; another; and another; — I counted seven or eight, each folded and unfolded very leisurely in a manner always different, and with gestures faithfully copied from nature. The British public enjoys this scene excessively, and the pantomimic variations a good actor knows how to introduce in it are sure to be vehemently applauded.

The spirit of broad comedy ends, however, with the First Clown's order to his inferior: "Go, get thee to Yaughan: fetch me a stoup of liquor"; and with the entrance of the Prince, accompanied by Horatio, the scene gradually moves toward seriousness, as the dramatist begins to present the intellectual humor of Hamlet tinged with philosophy and melancholia: "That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once!"

Finally this subdued form of humor, in which wit is mingled with gruesomeness in such a way as to sober the audience, is changed to simple pathos with the entrance of the burial procession.

To the dull tolling of the bell, the corpse, wrapped only in a winding sheet, is borne toward the grave, followed by

priests in clerical robes, and by the mourners. Hamlet infers, from the presence of the King, the Queen, and many courtiers, that the funeral is that of some one of "estate," and with no little curiosity asks Horatio: "Who is this they follow?" But Horatio does not know. Hamlet next observes that the burial-service is sadly "maimed," and from this fact draws the natural inference that he is witnessing the interment of a suicide: "This doth betoken the corse they follow did with desperate hand fordo its own life." The Church, indeed, which regarded self-murder as a capital crime, refused to a suicide not only all religious rites of funeral, but also interment in "sanctified ground" — that is, in churches, churchyards, or other places consecrated for burial purposes. As a result of this attitude of the ecclesiastics, and of the general odium attaching to suicide, the bodies of such unfortunates were often thrown into a shallow pit, with a stake driven through the chest; and stones, pebbles, and the like were hurled upon them in contumely. The First Clown, therefore, was fully warranted in his question: "Is *she* to be buried in *Christian* burial?" The sardonic reply of the Second Clown, "If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial," was nearer the truth than he suspected; the Priest tells us bluntly: "But that great command o'ersways the order, she should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd."

So Claudius had interfered. In the face of such "great command" the religious authorities, though with poor grace, had compromised. They refused to Ophelia burial within the church, an honor usually accorded to persons of her high social rank; but they agreed to let her be placed outside in the churchyard. The distinction between interment within the church and in the yard was very important; we find it in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, a main point of which is that the poet contemplates the lives of the humble peasants who are buried in the yard

as contrasted with the lives of the aristocrats who are buried inside:

> Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
> The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

At Stratford, Shakespeare's father, mother, brothers, and sisters were all buried in the yard; but the poet, having attained social distinction and fame, was placed inside the church, and along with him his wife and daughter. Polonius, no doubt, had been laid to rest in the ancestral vault of his family; but to Ophelia this right was denied. She had to be placed outside — even there under clerical protest — with the commonalty, such as the clown Yorick. And there, refused the "rest" granted by religion to "peace-parted souls," she must lie, an outcast under the suspicion of eternal damnation. Poor "rose of May" — harassed by a misunderstanding world even after death!

Hamlet, not wishing to intrude upon a burial so obviously embarrassing as this, and yet curious to learn who the suicide of rank might be, whispers to Horatio: "Couch we awhile and mark."

The body is placed at the edge of the open grave, and the mourners take their position, waiting in expectation of the final rites; but the clerics maintain a sullen and painful silence. At last Laertes speaks up: "What ceremony else?" To Horatio Hamlet observes: "That is Laertes," and then spontaneously adds, "a very noble youth." What terrible irony! We have just seen how utterly *ignoble* Laertes is. Yet Hamlet sincerely thinks him "very noble"; he declares that he "loved him ever," and in the next scene confidently trusts his life with him. Thus again the dramatist emphasizes the tragic flaw in the hero — an idealism that was fatal to him in a world where men and women are not always "what they seem."

To Laertes' polite question the priests, still angry that

the order of the Church should be overswayed by "great command," make no reply, and he is forced to repeat his inquiry. When finally the First Priest answers "No more," and adds in surly tones,

> We should profane the service of the dead
> To sing a requiem and such rest to her,

Laertes retorts: "I tell thee, churlish priest, a ministering angel shall my sister be ——" At the word "sister" Hamlet in astonishment exclaims: "What! the fair Ophelia?"

The news comes to him as a sudden and terrible shock. At first it stuns him; that is why he is so long silent. But his mind does a great deal of thinking. Not knowing that Ophelia had lost her reason, he takes her suicide to have been a deliberate act, the result necessarily of some unbearable grief. And the causes of that grief he can easily guess — his harsh treatment of her, and his murder of her father. He now sees that he had wrongly judged her. And as his thoughts dwell upon her youth and purity, and her obvious affection for him, and then upon his cruel renunciation of her and his bitter attacks upon her character, all his old love wells up anew, intensified by pity and remorse. So overcome is he with emotion that he can neither speak nor move; and in a kind of daze he watches the scene being enacted before him — a scene in which he, more than any one else in the world, is concerned.

The body is silently lowered into the grave. The Queen then advances, strews flowers, and steps back. The gravediggers drive their spades into the earth preparatory to filling the grave, and the first clods roll ominously over the edge. Whereupon Laertes, in a burst of passionate grief, interrupts them:

> O! treble woe
> Fall ten times treble on that cursed head
> Whose wicked deed thy most ingenious sense
> Depriv'd thee of!

The words, verifying Hamlet's suspicion, must have pierced his heart; yet he is still too stupefied to move.

As the grave-diggers lift their laden spades, Laertes again stops them:

> Hold off the earth awhile,
> Till I have caught her once more in mine arms.

Then, in a most sensational way, leaping into the grave, and taking the body in his arms, he shouts from below to the sextons:

> Now pile your dust upon the quick and dead,
> Till of this flat a mountain you have made
> To o'ertop old Pelion, or the skyish head
> Of blue Olympus!

How are we to understand his behavior? Hamlet calls it "rant" and "bravery" [= cheap ostentation]. Such it is. And being such, it is in fearfully bad taste on this pathetic occasion. Laertes is not speaking or acting as one does who is genuinely overcome by heart-melting grief. His display of sorrow is "showy" and "theatrical." As we say in common parlance, he is "playing to the gallery," thinking mainly of the effect he will produce on the spectators. His conduct is thus in reality an expression of egotism.

The bad taste offends Hamlet to the soul. But that is not the only emotion that stirs within him. He feels also a keen self-reproach that he, who loves Ophelia more truly and more deeply than does any one else, should be surpassed in the manifestation of grief, and, further, a resentment that egotistic rant should be employed to outdo him. And so, impelled by these conflicting emotions, he advances from his hiding-place:

> What is *he*, whose grief
> Bears such an emphasis?

The scorn is withering. Who is this negligible person who

rants with so much vehemence? And, as a rebuke to the egotistical element in Laertes' conduct, he declares:

> This is I,
> Hamlet, *the* Dane!

For the first time he claims his rightful rank as the King of Denmark. And he calls upon the world to witness that the person who *now* expresses supreme grief at Ophelia's death is no less than the King of the Danes. And, with this assertion of royal eminence, he too leaps into the grave, in order, like Laertes, to take a last farewell of Ophelia.

The situation is difficult for us to understand, for we cannot easily apprehend the storm of conflicting emotions in Hamlet's mind. It requires a great actor clearly to interpret those emotions to an audience. Shakespeare himself indicated the proper interpretation to the great actor Burbage, who as a result was able to achieve in the scene one of his most impressive triumphs. After his death in 1619 there was written on him an elegy, beginning: "He's gone! and with him, what a world are dead!" As the writer glanced back in fond memory over the notable parts Burbage had acted, his mind dwelt upon the play of *Hamlet*, and in particular upon this episode:

> Oft have I seen him leap into the grave,
> Suiting the person which he seemed to have
> Of a sad lover, with so true an eye
> That there I would have sworn he meant to die.

This, then, is the spirit in which Shakespeare conceived of Hamlet's leaping into the grave — with love inexpressible, and with tears of grief streaming down his face. And Burbage acted the part in such a way as to produce upon the audience an unforgettable feeling of pity.

But Laertes' egotistical bad taste at once turns this moving situation into a vulgar brawl. With an oath he hurls himself upon Hamlet, and tries to strangle him to death

here in the grave. Hamlet had not expected this. A fight in the grave, with trampling over the body of Ophelia, would be most unseemly; therefore at first he makes no resistance. Appealing to Laertes' reason, he says: "I prithee, take thy fingers from my throat"; and again: "Away thy hand!" Only when Laertes refuses, does Hamlet, from necessity, defend himself.

When at last they are separated and pulled out of the grave, Hamlet makes an effort to justify his behavior: "I loved Ophelia!" That is the point he wishes to make clear. No one loved her better, not even Laertes with all his show of grief: "Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up my sum."

And then, his anger at Laertes' bad taste again blazing up, he rushes into a whirlwind of language. If Laertes wishes to rant, Hamlet will out-rant him:

> Nay, an thou'lt mouth,
> I'll rant as well as thou!

Hamlet later explains this to Horatio: "Sure, the bravery [= cheap ostentation] of his grief did put me into a towering passion."

But Hamlet is also deeply hurt by Laertes' personal assault upon him. His hand goes to the finger-marks upon his throat:

> Hear you, sir:
> What is the reason that you use me thus?
> I lov'd you ever.

What an astonishing utterance! We are moved to pity the idealist who in the realization of a clear conscience thinks to retain the love of one whom he had so terribly injured.

Having at last spent his emotions, Hamlet goes out. Whereupon the two villains, left behind, put their heads together to compass his immediate destruction.

Act V, Scene II

The scene opens later on the same day, apparently just after dinner (cf. lines 175–76). Hamlet informs Horatio in detail of Claudius' treacherous attempt upon his life, and, as actual documentary proof, shows the King's letter, signed, and sealed with the royal signet. "Is it not perfect conscience," he asks, "to quit him with this arm?" When the practical-minded Horatio warns "It must be shortly known to him from England what is the issue of the business there," Hamlet answers in easy confidence: "It will be short; the interim is mine, and a man's life's no more" — his hand significantly falls to his rapier — "than to say 'One!' " The allusion is to the swordsman's claim of a hit upon the body of his opponent.

Does Hamlet, we are led to wonder, have in his mind a definite plan for securing revenge? If so, he reveals no details of it. Perhaps he does not think a formal plan necessary. He possesses documentary proof of Claudius' murderous attempt upon his life — justification enough for a bold and swift stroke; all that he needs, therefore, is resolution. And resolution in adequate measure he seems now to possess, or the text deceives us. The quiet confidence that dominates him cannot be mistaken. He has hurried back into the presence and power of a treacherous villain, who, he well knows, is bent on killing him; and, though the time for action is perilously short, he feels absolute assurance of his ability to execute his task.

Why, then, does he not at once address himself to that task? The dramatist is very careful to make the answer plain. Hamlet's delay *this* time is represented as due not to lack of will-power, but to the unexpected intervention of the fencing-match, which, as a gesture of friendliness to Laertes, he feels he cannot refuse. Let us observe how nicely the point is developed. Hamlet suddenly interrupts his

tirade against Claudius in order to express compunction at having been so rude to Laertes in the graveyard: "I am very sorry, good Horatio, that to Laertes I forgot myself"; and this sorrow, he tells us, is the deeper because of heartfelt sympathy with one who, like himself, is suffering in bereavement: "for, by the image of my cause I see the portraiture of his." And, with a contrition born of his sensitive nature, he resolves: "I'll court his favors" — he will do what he can to make amends for his unmannerly display of temper, and show that he holds for this "very noble youth" only the kindest sentiments. Instantly Osric enters with an invitation to a friendly fencing-match with Laertes. We should not overlook the skill with which the dramatist leads up to the delivery of the invitation, and thus prepares us for its acceptance.

The amusing scene that follows, in which Hamlet jests at the expense of the befeathered and dandified Osric, clearly shows us how far the shadow of melancholia has lifted from the soul of the hero. In the almost hilarious humor with which he makes a fool of the "chough," we realize what a different man he is from the moping creature of the earlier acts. Now he takes a wholesome interest in life, and such ebullient wit as he displays in teasing the "water-fly" argues the return of that lively spirit of fun which characterized him at Wittenberg.

Osric at last is able, in his own fantastic way and in his own perfumed diction, to deliver the invitation to the fencing-match with Laertes; and Hamlet promptly accepts.

Since we know all the treachery lying behind that seemingly innocent invitation, we impatiently ask, Why does he accept? Yet a little meditation will show us that his acceptance was inevitable. He does not look at the invitation through our eyes, for he is unaware of any evil motive inspiring it. Furthermore, with his idealistic nature, he is quite incapable of suspecting in others such perfidy as the

fencing-plot involved. Claudius, indeed, had just said with complete assurance: "He, being remiss, most generous and free from all contriving, will not peruse the foils." And thus Hamlet now does not suspect duplicity — does not for a moment question the friendly character of this match with Laertes. How could he, when he has perfect confidence in the challenger, a man whom he has "loved ever"? To Horatio he had said: "That is Laertes — a very noble youth." He believes it absolutely. He might, under other circumstances, suspect the King, but he feels implicit trust in Laertes. (It is worth note that his death comes not as a result of Claudius' two plans, but solely as a result of Laertes' cowardly trick in anointing the weapon with poison.) At the moment, too, anything like suspicion in his mind is overshadowed by contrition. He had recently been very rude to Laertes, and is genuinely sorry. He had just resolved to "court his favors." And now for him to refuse, on top of what already had happened, this offer of a friendly contest — "this brother's wager" as he calls it — would make matters worse. On the other hand, here would seem to be an excellent opportunity for him to show brotherly courtesy to Laertes, and with generous behavior to win again the favor of one whom he had unfortunately wronged. This, we may believe, is the chief motive that induces Hamlet to accept the invitation. And that Shakespeare means us so to understand it is shown a few moments later when a messenger enters with a special injunction from Gertrude: "The Queen desires you to use gentle [= generous] entertainment to Laertes before you fall to play." "She well instructs me," says Hamlet; it was his intention.

Thus the episode of the fencing-match with Laertes is interposed by Fate between Hamlet and his task of vengeance. The young Prince's too great trust in others — his tragic flaw — comes at the last moment to complete its work of destruction, and he falls a victim to his own nobility of

character rather than to melancholia. His death in this manner, we feel, is appropriate, for, by the higher standards, it represents a triumph in defeat.

The challenge having been accepted, Shakespeare at once, as was his custom, introduces dramatic foreshadowing in order to warn us that the catastrophe is now immediately to follow. Hamlet feels a premonition of disaster, a misgiving as to the coming contest that creeps over him in a most uncanny way. So pronounced and so weird is it that he is deeply affected; and though he tries to throw it off — "it is no matter," "it is but foolery" — it persists until he is forced to admit: "but it is such a kind of gain-giving as would perhaps trouble a woman." Even the phlegmatic Horatio is moved by a vague apprehension, and urges his friend to "obey" the inner warning. Hamlet, however, is no coward; and squaring his shoulders he says: "We defy augury!" In a tragedy it is dangerous to defy augury; Julius Cæsar did so, and a few moments later died at the hands of the conspirators.

The spell of fear thus cast over the audience is broken by a loud fanfare of trumpets, and the two villains, Claudius and Laertes, enter, followed by the whole Court. The King, in his efficient way, calls upon the contestants to shake hands, as was customary before a match of this nature. Hamlet eagerly seizes the hand of Laertes in a warm friendly grasp, and blurts out an apology for his behavior at the grave:

> Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong.
> But pardon't, as you are a gentleman.

And then he explains his killing of Polonius as an unfortunate accident due — as in truth it was — to his abnormal condition, or what the world calls his "madness." The apology is spoken with such obvious sincerity that Laertes is forced to accept it — though in granting that no blame

whatsoever attaches to Hamlet, he insists that he must consult "some elder masters" in affairs of "honor" to be sure that he has "precedent" for making peace. "But till that time," he declares, "I do receive your offer'd love like love, and will not wrong it."

That seemingly is a generous acceptance of Hamlet's proffered love, and the unsuspecting young Prince so takes it: "I embrace it freely, and will this brother's wager frankly play." Putting his arm in a brotherly way about Laertes' shoulder, he leads him over to the table where the foils are arranged.

At this moment the King calls out, "Cousin Hamlet!" whereupon Hamlet turns, thus bringing his back toward the table. Claudius, of course, has nothing to say; he is merely seeking to distract Hamlet's attention in order that his ally in villainy may have the opportunity to select the deadly weapon. Finding the "unbaited" and envenomed rapier, Laertes stands holding the point concealed in the palm of his left hand. Hamlet now turns to the table, picks up the first foil, shakes it, says, "This likes me well," and steps back. Whereupon the two fencers, with their seconds, advance to the center of the stage ready to begin.

Claudius, however, halts them. Ostentatiously he calls attention to a health that he proposes later to drink to Hamlet if Hamlet gives the first or second hit, or even quits in answer of the third exchange. In the cup, he announces, is to be thrown a pearl "richer than that which four successive Kings in Denmark's crown have worn." This form of extravagance was in former times much employed to convey to the world one's high esteem for a particular individual. "Cleopatra's union" [= pearl] was famous; and the Shakespearean audience was familiar with the story how Sir Thomas Gresham, on the occasion of the dedication of the Royal Exchange, drank to the honor of Queen Elizabeth a cup of wine in which was dissolved

a pearl costing £1500 — in modern value approximately $75,000.

The interruption over, the fencers and their seconds again prepare to begin the match.

From this point on, the scene involves far more action than speaking, and for its full appreciation needs a stage-performance. The mere reader, therefore, must make a special effort to visualize the situation, and try in his mind's eye to follow the exciting action which the slender text calls for. To aid in this effort any whose imagination may not be practiced in theatrical interpretation, I shall sketch the events somewhat more fully perhaps than otherwise would be called for.

The King and Queen are seated upon their canopied "chair of state" placed on a dais elevated two or three steps above the level of the floor. (This raised "state," or "throne" as it was often called, was a regular property in all Elizabethan theaters.) To one side of the dais stands a table (cf. line 272), with foils, flagons of wine, and a large silver-gilt cup. The fencers take their place directly in front of the King and Queen, and their seconds — or "judges" as they are called — Osric for Laertes and Horatio for Hamlet, stand slightly behind them. Three separate bouts are to be played, each lasting several minutes. At the expiration of the time allowed for a bout, the judges are to step in, and, lifting their swords, part the contestants.

Hamlet and Laertes assume the dueling position, and, with the usual formality, begin the contest. Naturally while a bout lasts there is no talking. We hear the clash of the weapons, see the lunges and parries, and occasionally hear one of the fencers claim a touch; but the scene is designed for acting, not reading.

After a moment of fighting the silence is broken by Hamlet claiming a hit. Though protested by Laertes, it is allowed by the judges; and the play is resumed. No further

points, however, are scored, and hence no further textual interruption occurs. Finally, the time-limit being reached, the signal is given by the judges, and the first bout comes to an end.

Instantly the King calls for the cup. He holds up to the admiration of the Court what seems to be a "union" — or pearl — of extraordinary size and beauty. Dropping it into the cup, and crushing it with a pestle, he pours in wine, places the brim to his lips, and pretends to drink to the success of his nephew. Then, handing the vessel to a page, he says: "Give him the cup." The page, descending the dais, offers the cup to Hamlet. Will he drink? For the audience it is an anxious moment. Suddenly the kettle-drums roll, the trumpets blare out, and cannon boom "to the heavens." When at last the noise dies away, Hamlet quietly says: "I'll play this bout first. Set it by a while." The page places the cup on the table, while the audience draws a breath of relief. How shrewdly Shakespeare uses this episode to heighten our sympathy with the hero! The few moments of anxiety prolonged by the noise, and the relief that follows, make us regard Hamlet's danger almost as our own, and his subsequent escape affords us the keenest satisfaction.

The second bout is now begun. For a while we hear only the clashing of the weapons and the heavy breathing of the fencers. Then the silence is again broken by Hamlet: "Another hit!" Laertes admits it, and the contest is resumed. At last the time is up, and the judges separate the contestants. Hamlet has now secured two hits, whereas the much-bepraised Laertes with all his foreign training has secured none. This, too, wins the approval of the audience, and increases its sympathy with the hero.

The Queen, observing Hamlet's heavy breathing, says, "he's fat" — that is, not in good physical training for such violent exercise; and leaving the canopied state, she comes down to where he stands near the table, and offers him her

handkerchief to wipe away the perspiration. While he is mopping his brow, her eye falls on the cup of wine. A sudden impulse comes to her, and she lifts the chalice to her son: "The Queen carouses to thy fortune, Hamlet!" She wishes thus to express to him her love, and Hamlet accepts it in the spirit in which it is offered: "Good madam!" The King, however, rushes down from the state, and nervously seizes her arm: "Gertrude, do not drink!" She indignantly breaks away: "I *will*, my lord." She cannot understand why she should not express her affection for her son. And smiling upon Hamlet, she drinks the fatal poison, as the King moans: "It is too late!"

The effect of this little episode upon us is profound. We now realize that catastrophe is imminent; all bridges of hope are, so to speak, burned behind us; and with a feeling of utter helplessness we await the coming events, while the emotions of pity and fear quite overwhelm us.

Gertrude, having drunk, offers the cup to her son. With a smile of thanks, he says, "I dare not drink yet, madam," and sets it aside. The Queen then affectionately places her arm about his shoulder, and wipes the moisture from his brow. This show of tenderness on her part further raises her in our esteem. Her very death is made to come as a direct result of her love for Hamlet, and to that extent is ennobled. Surely Shakespeare meant for us to think better of Gertrude now, and to vouchsafe to her in her hour of atonement some measure of pardon.

While this moving display of affection is taking place, Laertes edges over to the King and whispers: "My lord, I'll hit him now." But to himself he adds: "And yet, 'tis almost 'gainst my conscience." Laertes is not by nature bad; he is merely weak, and being weak, had been, in a moment of evil passion, bent to the will of a master villain. Hamlet's manly apology and frank trust in him as in a brother touch his conscience, and make the doing of the proposed deed

very hard. Perhaps that explains why up to the present he had not secured a single hit; knowing that the merest scratch with his envenomed point meant sure death, he could not bring himself to do the cowardly trick. Hamlet notes Laertes' hesitation, and openly protests: "You but dally; I pray you, pass with your best violence." Thus we see Shakespeare tempering, as he did in the case of Gertrude, our feeling of resentment at Laertes, and preparing him for a partly honorable death. Only for Claudius, who is responsible for the sinning of Gertrude, the treachery of Laertes, and all the terrible suffering in the play, are we allowed no abatement of hatred.

The Queen resumes her place on the state, the contestants and their seconds advance, and the third and last bout begins. Most of it is fought in silence, broken only by the noise of shifting feet and clashing weapons. Finally the time is nearly up, and Osric, preparing to stop the bout, declares: "Nothing neither way." Laertes has been so conscience-stricken that even to the end he has deferred the cowardly deed. But realizing that it must be now or never, he suddenly suppresses his conscience, and lunges at Hamlet. With the cry "Have at you — now!" he abandons his own defense — for what has he to fear from his opponent's foil safely guarded by a button? All he needs to do is to scratch Hamlet slightly; and this he can most surely do if he ignores the technical rules of good swordsmanship. So completely does he abandon his defense that Hamlet actually seizes his wrist behind the rapier.

Precisely what happens next is not clear. Possibly, as fencing instructions advised in this situation, Laertes counters by seizing Hamlet's wrist, and in the struggle that ensues each wrests from the other his weapon. Modern actors, however, manage the exchange of weapons in another way. Hamlet seizes Laertes' wrist, and with a dexterous movement wrenches the weapon from his grasp.

Then, with fine courtesy, smilingly presents his own to his opponent, and, stooping, picks up the other from the floor. This magnanimous behavior on Hamlet's part unnerves the conscience-stricken Laertes, so that immediately Hamlet is able to secure an easy hit. Claudius, realizing the danger in which Laertes stands, shouts: "Part them! They are incens'd!" Hamlet denies the statement, and in the exhilaration of what he takes to be an exciting rally, cries: "Nay, come again." The time, however, is already up, and the judges, stepping in, part the contestants.

It will be noted that each second, observing his friend to bleed, anxiously asks, "How is it?" Laertes replies to the question; but Hamlet, seeing his mother fall, had run to her side with the cry: "How does the Queen?" Claudius craftily tries to conceal the cause of her illness by suggesting that she is overcome at the sight of blood; but Gertrude exposes him: "No! No!" She protests: "The drink! the drink!" Then looking at her son with mingled appeal and affection, "O my dear Hamlet," she throws her arms about him. And with the final charge, "The drink! the drink! I am poisoned," she dies in Hamlet's arms.

He gently puts her down. Then rising to his full height, and lifting the rapier, which he still holds, he shouts: "O, villainy! Ho! Let the door be locked." Horatio leaps to the door and locks it. Then Laertes, from the floor where he had fallen, makes a frank confession of his and Claudius' plot; and, thrusting out his arm, he points accusingly to the King, who cowers on his throne: "The King, the King's to blame!"

The final test for Hamlet has come. He has just learned anew of Claudius' treachery. He has learned, also, that he has only a few minutes to live. The important task imposed upon him by his father's spirit is yet to be done. Claudius is before him. Hamlet stands with weapon ready in hand. Will he now act?

With a swift glance at the rapier, showing him the deadly point unprotected, he exclaims: "Envenom'd too! Then, venom, to thy work!" And leaping up the dais, he drives the blade clear through Claudius. When the King in terror appeals to the courtiers with the statement, "I am but hurt," Hamlet is again fired to action. Seizing the cup, he leaps a second time to the throne: "Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink off this potion," and he forces the poisonous contents between the villain's teeth. As the liquor trickles down Claudius' throat, Hamlet utters a grim pun: "Is thy 'union' here? Follow my mother." Shakespeare, who thoroughly understood the psychology of human emotions, knew that in moments of great stress the mind is apt to seek relief in trivial bits of humor, such as this.

The King dies before the cup has been emptied. Neither the venom on the rapier's point nor the poisonous liquor in the cup was needed. Hamlet's strong right arm had not faltered in its task — the blow alone was sufficient.

Laertes, reaching out his hand, begs forgiveness, and Hamlet, generously seizing the proffered hand, says: "Heaven make thee free of it." It is an affecting pose, prolonged for a moment; then Laertes falls back dead, with Hamlet still holding his hand in pardon.

All attention is now focussed upon the dying hero. "I follow thee," he murmurs, as he wearily seats himself upon the dais. Already he feels the poison working. With dazed eyes he glances about him. First he observes his loyal friend, Horatio: "I am dead, Horatio." Then his eyes rest upon the body of Gertrude: "Wretched Queen, adieu!" The word "wretched" in Elizabethan English meant merely "unfortunate," and was often used as a term of loving commiseration, as when Gertrude said of Hamlet: "Look where the poor wretch comes reading." Thus Hamlet, in words of mingled compassion and affection, bids farewell to his

mother. Next he observes the courtiers, who gaze at him in awed silence:

> You that look pale, and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes or audience to this act,
> Had I but time —

A sudden convulsion of pain halts his utterance. He tries to tell his "story," but two further paroxysms interrupt his effort. Then he appeals to Horatio to tell that story: "Report me and my cause aright." But Horatio grimly replies: "Never believe it! I am more an antique Roman than a Dane." The Roman Stoics held that suicide was an honorable act; and it is to suicide that Horatio refers. Lifting the poisoned cup, "Here's yet some liquor left," he starts to drain it off.

Hamlet, with sudden and unexpected strength, leaps to his feet and seizes the cup: "As thou'rt a man, give me the cup!" — there is a struggle — "Let go!" — further struggle — "By Heaven, I'll have it!" With almost superhuman strength he wrests the cup from Horatio's hand, and dashes it to the floor. Then, exhausted by this effort, he sinks again to the dais.

And now a second time he appeals to Horatio "to tell my story," and so earnestly does he urge his appeal — "if thou didst ever hold me in thy heart" — that Horatio yields. Hamlet's anxiety about his good name is merely another indication of the genuine nobility of his nature. At the moment of death, tortured with pain, his chief concern is that the people of Denmark and the world at large shall think well of him. And what would Horatio tell? The full guilt of Claudius from beginning to end, but not the secret shame of Gertrude. Hamlet never had revealed that. His mother's great sin died with her.

The quiet horror of the death-scene is broken by the sound of cannon within. Fortinbras, it is announced, has returned from the Polish campaign "with conquest." He

had not failed, but comes in triumph, still the personification of energy. And Hamlet nominates him as the successor to the throne of Denmark.

In a final plea to Horatio to tell his story — "with the occurrents, more and less, which have solicited" — Hamlet's strength quickly fails; and with the mysterious, half-audible "The rest is silence," his head wearily sinks forward in death.

During the few minutes of life left to him he had accomplished all that we could possibly ask of him: he had avenged his father's spirit, had forgiven Laertes, had expressed an affectionate farewell to his mother, had prevented his friend Horatio from committing suicide, had provided for his "good name" with the people of Denmark, and had chosen a successor to the throne. We are thus prepared to hear Horatio say:

> Now cracks a noble heart! Good-night, sweet prince!
> And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest.

In these words Shakespeare himself seems to utter a benediction over one whom he loved.

For a moment the hush that follows death keeps the stage. Then in the distance is heard the sound of drums in a military march, which comes nearer and nearer, until at last it ushers before our eyes Fortinbras, the man of energy. Promptly he assumes command of the situation, and issues orders. For Hamlet — not for the dead King or the others — he devises a funeral of great honor:

> Let four captains
> Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage. . . .
> And for his passage
> The soldier's music and the rites of war
> Speak loudly for him.

Again Shakespeare is expressing his own sentiments; and he would have us believe that Hamlet deserved this singular

honor. At heart the young Prince was a soldier; he had fought a good fight; and, though he lost his life, he had not lost the idealism and sweetness of character that endeared him to the people of Denmark, and to Shakespeare, and, we may add, that still endears him to the world.

In silence the bodies of Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes are taken away. Finally Hamlet's body is lifted by four captains on their shields, and to the sound of martial music is borne off as in triumph. The stage is emptied. The music fades in the distance. Then the boom of cannon, and the play is over.

THE SOURCES AND HISTORY OF *HAMLET*

Hamlet in early legend. Among the fierce-hearted pirate folk of northern Europe, the story of Prince Hamlet, who with cunning madness achieved a terrible revenge on his enemies, early became the subject of legendary treatment.[1] Snæbjörn, a tenth-century Icelandic sea-rover and bard, who about 980 made an Arctic expedition in search of unknown land — and whose cousin is said to have pushed over the Atlantic to the New World — furnishes us with our first allusion to the hero, then already famous. The passage, merely eight lines of verse from a lost narrative of ocean adventure, has been accidentally preserved by the Icelandic writer Snorri Sturlason, in his *Skaldskapar-mál* (*c.* 1230), a handbook on the art of poetry with many illustrative quotations from poets and ancient lays. In answer to the question "What are the names for the sea?" Sturlason cites, among other descriptive passages, the fragment from Snæbjörn referred to above:

'Tis said that far out, beyond the skirts of the earth, the Nine Maidens [in Icelandic legend the Nine Daughters of the Ocean-god Ægir, poetically representative of the surging waters] of the Island Mill [the great Maelstrom, one of the wonders of the world, the Moskoeström of the Norwegians] stir amain the host-cruel Skerry-quern [the dangerous rocky-island mill-stones] — they who in ages past ground Hamlet's meal.

The significance of the allusion to Hamlet's "meal" is revealed in Saxo Grammaticus' somewhat later account of the Prince, based on early legends and on sagas now lost. In his *History of the Danes*, Saxo tells how Hamlet's compan-

[1] See Israel Gollancz, *The Sources of Hamlet*, 1926.

ions, thinking him mad, often tried to create humor at his expense, yet invariably to their sallies he gave "cunning answers."

> Also, as they [walking "along the beach" of the sea] passed the sandhills, and bad him "look at the *meal*" — meaning the sand — he replied that it had been ground small by the hoary tempests of the ocean.

This answer was praised by all as exceedingly witty; and in early legends of Hamlet it must have been cited as a typical instance of his cunning.

Other, though vaguer and less certain, allusions to the hero leave hardly any doubt that in "ages past" the story of the young Prince's subtle madness and terrible revenge was exultantly sung by the fierce bards of the north, and that his personality then exercised upon the imagination of a savage-hearted people something like the fascination it now has for the most civilized races of the world.

Saxo Grammaticus. The earliest formal account of Hamlet preserved for us is contained in the Latin *Historia Danica* written by Saxo Grammaticus, a contemporary of Sturlason, about the beginning of the thirteenth century. Although the author compiled the authentic portions of his history from classical Latin writers and from Bede, Adam of Bremen, and Dudo, for the remote legendary period he necessarily had to rely upon ancient tradition and upon such northern sagas as those cited by Sturlason.

His long narrative of Hamlet, extending through approximately ten thousand words, is substantially identical with that of Belleforest, summarized below.

Belleforest. The next telling of the story — and the immediate source of the English play — was by a sixteenth-century French writer, Belleforest, who, beginning in 1565, published a series of tragical novels under the general title

Histoires tragiques. In the fifth series, issued in 1576, he included the narrative of Hamlet.

Belleforest drew his "tragical history" of the young Danish Prince straight from Saxo Grammaticus, but added some literary embroideries that affected the dramatized version. In order to show the material which the English author wove into a play I shall briefly sketch the story as told by the French adapter.

Horvendile [= the elder Hamlet] and his brother Fengon [= Claudius] were joint kings of "Jutie, at this present time called Ditmarsse," ruling that land under the superior lordship of King Rodericke. Soon Horvendile, through his prowess at arms, "obtained the highest place in his time, being the most renowned pirate that in those days scoured the seas and havens of the north parts." His great fame moved the valiant and warlike King of Norway to challenge him to a personal combat, to be fought under certain chivalrous terms. Horvendile accepted the challenge, killed his opponent, and according to "the conditions of the combat" seized upon his riches; after which he slew "the King's sister, a very brave and valiant warrior, and overran all the coast of Norway." As a result of this notable achievement, King Rodericke gave him "Geruth, his daughter, to wife, with whom he knew Horvendile to be already much enamoured." Of this marriage there was born an only son, named Hamblet.

In the course of time, Fengon, "fretting in his heart at the great honor and reputation won by his brother in warlike affairs," and "desirous to be only governor" of the land, treacherously murdered Horvendile, married Geruth, and seized the whole kingdom for himself. He excused his wicked murder by "slandering" his dead brother "that he would have slain his wife, and that he by chance finding him upon the point ready to do it, in defense of the lady had slain him." The deed, as thus explained, "of the nobility was esteemed for justice." But fratricide was not the only crime involved in this unsavory affair; even before Fengon "had any violent or bloody hands, or had once committed parricide upon his brother, he had incestuously abused his wife." The shameful conduct of Geruth while her first husband was still alive "made divers men think that she had been the cause of the murder, thereby to live in her adultery without control." Nevertheless, all

the noblemen became staunch supporters of the villain, and firmly established him in the usurpation of his brother's throne.

"The Prince Hamblet, perceiving himself to be in danger of his life, as being abandoned by his own mother," and burning with the desire "to revenge the death of his father," began to counterfeit lunacy. "He rent and tore his clothes, wallowing and lying in dirt and mire," and thus convinced most persons of the Court that he was mad. But a few men of a "deeper reach," observing that he spent much of his time fashioning barbed spikes, and that "he often made such and so fit answers" as to suggest cunning wit, "counseled the King to try and know whether" Hamblet's antic behavior was genuine. "And they could find no better nor more fit invention to entrap him than to set a fair and beautiful woman," one whom the Prince was known wholly to love [= Ophelia], "to seek to allure his mind to have his pleasure of her." But a certain young gentleman who "had been nourished with him" [= Horatio] gave Hamblet warning of the trap, as did also the young lady herself, who loved him deeply, so that he escaped the snare set for him.

This attempt failing, a specially politic courtier [= Polonius] announced to the King that he had conceived a far craftier means "to entrap Hamblet," namely that "Hamblet should be shut up alone in a chamber with his mother," wherein the courtier himself "should secretly be hidden behind the hangings . . . there to stand and hear their speeches." The King agreeing to the plan, the trap was set. But Hamblet, ever suspicious, on entering the room began to crow like a cock, and to beat his arms upon the hangings. Feeling there some object, he drove his sword through the hangings and killed the treacherous eavesdropper.

After secretly disposing of the body, he returned to his mother and began furiously to tongue-lash her: "O most infamous woman! . . . that like a vile wanton adulteress, altogether impudent and given over to her pleasure, runs, spreading forth her arms joyfully, to embrace the traitorous villainous tyrant that murdered my father, and most incestuously receivest the villain into the lawful bed of your loyal spouse . . . to live like a brute beast!" Geruth, her conscience stirred by the accusations of her son, began to weep in shame and repentance; whereupon Hamblet's attitude towards her changed. He revealed to her that he had all this time been merely feigning madness as a stratagem to save his life, and that he was firmly resolved to take upon Fengon and the disloyal noblemen "such and so great vengeance these countries

shall forever speak thereof." Having thus disclosed to his mother his important secret, he made a request of her, reinforced with a threat, that she see to it "above all things, as you love your own life and welfare, that neither the King, nor any other, may by any means know mine intent."

In spite of the harshness of his language, the Queen took no offense: "She forgot all disdain and wrath, which thereby she might as then have had hearing herself so sharply chidden and reproved." In her shame, "she durst not lift up her eyes to behold him, remembering her offense," but "weeping most bitterly" confessed her sin, and announced her willingness to aid him in any "means invented for the revenging of thy father's death." Hamblet accepted her change of heart as sincere: "Madam (said Hamblet) I will put my trust in you."

The King, unable to discover what had become of the eavesdropper — for Hamblet had well disposed of the body — became frightened. Yet he dared not openly put the Prince to death, and, further, he wished not to offend Geruth, who "loved and much cherished" her only son. Accordingly he determined to send his nephew to England to be murdered there by the king of that country. Hamblet, divining his uncle's purpose, resolved to outwit him, and to that end enlisted the aid of his mother. It was planned that she was to offer no objection to his going, was to cover the walls of the banquet-hall with hangings firmly nailed at the bottom, was to keep ready at hand the barbed spikes he had prepared, and, on the anniversary of his departure, was to have the King and noblemen celebrate in that hall his funerals. He assured her that he would then return and execute a terrible revenge on all his enemies.

To accompany Hamblet on the voyage Fengon sent two of his faithful ministers bearing secret letters to the King of England ordering Hamblet's death. On board the ship, while the ministers were asleep, the Prince read the letters, altered the wording so as to shift his doom upon his companions, and added a passage requesting the King of England to give his daughter to Hamblet in marriage.

As the year drew to an end, the young Prince set forth for Denmark; and being arrived, and resuming his madness, "he entered into the palace of his uncle the same day they were celebrating his funerals." His unexpected appearance caused great astonishment, and then much hilarity, among the revelers. Hamblet humored their jesting, and plied them with full cups until they were

entirely overcome in drink ("a vice common and familiar among" the Danes). Seeing them all in a stupor, he made the hangings of the hall to fall down and cover them, and with the barbed spikes which he had prepared, and which his mother had placed ready at hand, he bound and tied the hangings in such sort that it was impossible for any of the victims to escape. This accomplished, he set fire to the hall and burned the faithless noblemen to death.

The King, however, had "before the end of the banquet withdrawn himself into his chamber." Hamblet now followed him thither, roused him from his bed, and with one stroke of a sword severed his head from his body, shouting: "See thou forget not to tell thy brother (whom thou traiterously slewest) that it was his son that sent thee thither with the message, to the end that, being comforted thereby, his soul may rest among the blessed spirits, and quit me of the obligation that bound me to pursue his vengeance."

The rest of the story — how Hamblet married two wives, and finally was killed by King Wiglere — has no significance for the play.

The pre-Shakespearean *Hamlet*. Apparently in the summer of 1589, a tragedy of *Hamlet*, derived from Belleforest, was placed on the English stage.[1] With its melodramatic plot, its sensational episodes, its ghost, and its ranting language, it was well designed to please the crowds that thronged the open-air theaters; and evidence that it attained great popularity is not lacking. Thomas Nashe, in his epistle prefixed to Greene's *Menaphon* (entered in the Stationers' Registers on August 23, 1589), employs its title as a common noun for tragic rant: "He will afford you whole *Hamlets* — I should say handfuls of tragical speeches." And other writers show that the name of the hero early became almost synonymous with "revenge." Especially did the representation of the Ghost, with whitened face and

[1] There is no earlier allusion to the play than August, 1589; and a passage in *Fratricide Punished* (see p. 346) seems clearly to refer to the disastrous expedition against Portugal in the spring of 1589.

high-pitched voice, crying out for vengeance, leave upon the mind of the public an indelible impression.

It is generally believed by scholars that the author of this original *Hamlet* was Thomas Kyd. Its plot was of the "bloody revenge type," with a ghost, a play-in-a-play, an abundance of soliloquies, and a piling-up of bodies at the end, which Kyd had rendered popular in *Hieronimo* (*c.* 1586–87); [1] and in situations and even in phraseology it closely resembled the known works of that able dramatist. We cannot be positive, however, for the play might well have been the product of some slavish imitator of Kyd.

Unfortunately the original *Hamlet* has not been preserved — the stage-manuscript, we may suppose, perished in Shakespeare's revision; yet we are not entirely without knowledge of its plot and characterization, as will appear from the subsequent discussion.

The London actors were often forced to travel in the country — to go, as Dekker put it, "on the hard hoof from village to village" — especially when the plague rendered acting in the city impossible. For use on these provincial tours they naturally selected those plays which had been most successful in the metropolis, or which they thought would most appeal to rural audiences. But a play in its full text, as presented in the capacious theaters of London, by a large troupe, and with elaborate stage equipment, would not be suitable for traveling purposes. A company on tour was forced severely to reduce its personnel; the facilities for acting were often limited to a narrow platform on barrel-heads; and the provincial audiences did not demand the long performances that prevailed in the city. Accordingly, it was the custom of the actors to prepare a shortened adaptation of a play selected for country use. They eliminated certain characters in order to allow the presentation to be made by a small cast, dropped unnecessary scenes, cut

[1] The play is now called *The Spanish Tragedy.*

long speeches, omitted others, provided for the doubling of parts, and in general reduced the length of the text by more than a third. And for the guidance of the travelers a special prompt-book had to be prepared, incorporating all the changes.

That such a truncated version was made of the popular *Hamlet* can hardly be doubted. One bit of evidence may here be cited; other evidence will follow.

During the severe plague that closed all theaters in London from the summer of 1592 to the summer of 1594, the Chamberlain's Men, who owned *Hamlet*, having reduced their personnel to a minimum, were touring the provinces acting shortened versions of their most successful plays. The plague at last subsiding, on or shortly before June 3, 1594, they hurried to London and reported to their former manager, Philip Henslowe, owner of the Rose playhouse. But the Rose was then undergoing repairs, and Henslowe sent them, along with the Admiral's Men, to act temporarily at Newington Butts. A few days later, in his *Diary*, where he recorded his takings at plays, he noted: "9 of June, 1594, received at *Hamlet* viij*s*." We have even reason to believe that the troupe, fresh from the country, and not yet reconstructed into a full city company, had acted at Newington a play they had been presenting on their recent tour.

Fratricide Punished. From about 1586 on, small bands of inferior English actors were accustomed to travel in Germany, and to present before audiences in that country, where the drama was as yet undeveloped, the more popular London plays. Though they spoke in their own tongue, they drew large crowds, and were able to eke out a fair living. At some date, probably anterior to the close of the century, a troupe of these strolling English actors carried to Germany the sensational melodrama *Hamlet*, employing, of course, an abbreviated version. Later, a troupe of crude

German actors secured the play, turned it into German (many words betray an English origin), and presented it at country fairs and elsewhere. A manuscript of this German version, entitled *Der bestrafte Brudermord, oder Prinz Hamlet aus Daennemark* (*Fratricide Punished, or Prince Hamlet of Denmark*), has been preserved, transcribed in 1710 from a much earlier manuscript. Although it sadly mangles the English abbreviated text from which it was derived, it still plainly shows in outline a definite and reasonably well-formed dramatization of the Hamlet story. This dramatization, however, could not have been Shakespeare's, for its differences in conception of character and in details of plot are far too fundamental. The conclusion seems inescapable that here we have a debasement of the older play as written about 1589.

A few illustrations will make this clear, and at the same time give some notion of the original *Hamlet*.

(1) The tragedy opens with an allegorical-classical Prologue of Night calling up the Furies — Alecto, Thesiphone, and Megæra — and ordering them to "kindle the fire of revenge." This resembles the prologues to Kyd's *Hieronimo* and *Soliman and Perseda*, and in its general spirit and style clearly suggests the hand of that dramatist.

(2) The names of some of the characters are different from those in Shakespeare. Polonius appears as Corambus; Claudius and Gertrude are called merely King and Queen; [1] Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are entirely absent; and Osric is anticipated by a foolish courtier-clown Pantasmo, who closely resembles the clown in Kyd's *Soliman and Perseda*, and who, like that clown, appears throughout the play in order to link the action and supply a flow of humor.

(3) Horatio is represented not as a fellow-student of the

[1] In the *Dramatis Personae* prefixed to the 1710 transcript they are strangely and without textual justification designated Erico and Sigrie.

young Prince at Wittenberg, but as an officer of the Danish army, in charge of the watch; Hamlet says to him: "On you rests the safety of the king and kingdom." In Shakespeare's version, Horatio's association with the watch suggests this earlier conception, for it is strange that a university student freshly arrived at Elsinore should be intimately connected with the military defense of the realm.

(4) The conception of the young Prince and of his attitude toward revenge is also entirely different from that of Shakespeare, and — one should not miss the significance of this — close to that of Belleforest. Hamlet, upon receiving from the Ghost the news of his father's murder, at once confides the secret to Horatio, announces his stratagem of feigned madness, and declares his firm determination to effect his revenge "at the very first opportunity." There is never any suggestion of unwarranted delay. The only reason Hamlet does not promptly succeed in killing the villain is that the King is "always surrounded by many guards." In despair Hamlet later resolves to attempt to penetrate this guard, even though it cost him his life; to Horatio he says: "Should you chance to find my dead body, let it be honorably buried; for at the first opportunity I will try my chance with him." But this opportunity does not offer itself, and in the Fifth Act we hear him complain: "I can not attain to my revenge because the fratricide is surrounded all the time by so many people." The representation of the delay as solely due to external difficulty was, we may believe, taken over by the original dramatist from Belleforest.

(5) The conception of Ophelia is likewise different. Almost nothing is made of the love-romance existing between her and Hamlet — little more than is suggested by Belleforest. When Hamlet pretends madness, he continually "plagues" her by following her about and "frightening" her; and when later she goes mad she amorously pursues in

a farcical way the clown Phantasmo (a scene perhaps imitated or parodied in *The Thracian Wonder*, a play of about 1598 which contains several echoes of *Hamlet*). Finally she commits suicide by throwing herself from "a high hill." In both her madness (cf. Isabella in *Hieronimo*) and her manner of death, we see evidence of the hand of Kyd.

(6) Besides these, and other, significant differences in the conception of the characters, there are important differences in the details of the plot. Hamlet was robbed of his throne while he was away from Denmark, and his uncle, in order to placate him, made him King of Norway; later his uncle urges him: "Betake yourself to your kingdom, Norway." Apparently the original author of the play assumed, as well he might from Belleforest's account, that Hamlet's father, when he overcame and slew the King of Norway, and subsequently the king's warlike sister, acquired the throne of that country. Such a conception, however, is entirely incompatible with Shakespeare's version.

(7) Hamlet is sent to England in care of two hired assassins, who are charged to kill him themselves, but failing in this, to deliver him, with a letter, to the King of England. On the way, the ship, detained by "contrary winds," is anchored near an island. The assassins take Hamlet ashore, announce to him that on orders from the King they are going to put him to death, and aim pistols at him from opposite sides. Hamlet requests them to allow him a few minutes in which to pray, and to fire when he gives the signal. The moment he gives the signal, he drops to the ground, and the two assassins shoot each other. Searching their pockets, Hamlet discovers the treacherous letter of his uncle, and returns to Elsinore by land. Kyd was fond of sensational death-scenes of this kind. In *Hieronimo* we have one assassin shooting another in a cunningly devised situation, with a letter subsequently found in the dead assassin's pocket revealing the treachery of the villain.

(8) In the fencing match at the end of the play, the contest begins fairly, with both combatants using foils. But, in accordance with the King's suggestion, Leonhardus had concealed on the floor an unbaited and empoisoned rapier "exactly like" the foil he is using. In the second bout, he drops his foil and picks up the deadly rapier. Later, in the heat of the contest, both men exchange weapons, and Hamlet, unaware that he is using a rapier that is unbaited, gives Leonhardus a mortal thrust. The King thereupon seeks with poisoned wine to kill both men, so that no one will be left alive to disclose his treachery (a regular device with Kyd's villains; cf. *Hieronimo* and *Soliman and Perseda*). Calling for the wine, he urges the two wounded men to drink. As Phantasmo brings the cup, the Queen halts him in order to take a draught. The King turns, and, seeing the Queen drinking, tries to stop her, shouting that the wine is poisoned. Whereupon Hamlet stabs him in the back. Then he stabs Phantasmo, who was merely unlucky enough to be the bearer of the cup. All this — especially the gratuitous killing of Phantasmo — is thoroughly in the manner of Kyd.

As bearing on the date, it may be noted that there is embedded in the text an allusion to the disastrous English expedition against Portugal in the spring of 1589, "in which eleven thousand soldiers perished out of twenty-one thousand, and, of eleven hundred gentlemen who accompanied it, only three hundred and fifty returned to their native country." When the King announces to Hamlet his resolve to send him to England, Hamlet replies: "Just send me to Portugal, so that I may never come back again."

Thus it seems highly probable that in this German mangling of an English traveling version we are able to glimpse, though in a sadly defaced mirror, the general outline of the old tragedy of *Hamlet* as originally conceived by Kyd or some very close imitator of his style.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. After a popular play had been on the stage for five or six years, the actors commonly employed a skilled dramatist to revise it. Since the purpose of the revision was to draw London audiences to witness afresh an already famous play, the main structure of the plot was not altered, but new lines, new characters, and new scenes were added — enough to warrant the familiar advertisement "newly revised, with additions." In view of this time-honored custom, based on sound business principles, it is very likely that *Hamlet* was thus revamped at least once before the close of the century. Perhaps we may fairly place this revamping in 1596, for Thomas Lodge, in his *Wit's Miserie* (entered in the Stationers' Registers on May 5, 1596) familiarly writes: "He looks as pale as the vizard of the ghost which cried so miserably at the Theatre, like an oyster-wife, *Hamlet, revenge!*"; and shortly afterwards we find a great deal of interest in stage-ghosts shouting for revenge. The "Theatre" was then occupied by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who owned the manuscript of *Hamlet*, and Shakespeare was their playwright. It may well be that the task of revision was assigned to him. If so, he probably contented himself with a superficial reworking of the old text — especially the scenes in which the Ghost appeared, and with just enough "additions" to give the play a fresh appeal. In due time, of course, there would be prepared from this revised manuscript an abbreviated version for use in the country.

Although we have many reasons to suppose that such a revamping of the old *Hamlet* was made about 1596, and some cause to suspect Shakespeare's hand in it, definite external evidence is lacking. All we can confidently say is that in 1600 or 1601 the great dramatist undertook a thorough revision of the play. Drawing from the store-room of the theater the prompt-book of the tragedy as it had been acted, he set to work — changing the names of some of the characters,

improving the speeches, pasting on substitutions or additions, discarding some scenes, creating fresh scenes, modifying the plot here and there, and in general — while preserving, as was his custom, much of the original text — giving to the play a new vividness and significance.

The former prompt-book as a result of all these additions and alterations was in a sadly patched-up condition, resembling, we may suppose, the extant revamped prompt-book of *Sir Thomas More*. The actors, however, invariably required of an author what they called a "fair copy" of a play, since the manuscript had to be read by the Master of the Revels for licensing, and had later to be converted into the official prompt-book. Shakespeare, therefore, prepared for the use of the actors a neat transcript; and as he copied, he took occasion to make frequent improvements in diction,[1] to add to the dramatic effectiveness of speeches,[2] to straighten out the meter, at times to omit a sentence or even a long passage when his judgment told him that it might well be spared, at other times to expand as new inspiration came to him. In short, he made just such improvements as we might naturally expect from any author under the given circumstances. The "fair copy" was in due time turned over to the censor for reading; and then, with the license of the government Office of the Revels attached, was, in accordance with theatrical usage, made into the "allowed" prompt-book.

When a few weeks later the play was performed at the Globe, it achieved a remarkable success: "Faith, it should please all, like *Prince Hamlet*," wrote the London poet Scoloker. But its fame extended beyond the audiences of the city; the actors, we are told, were called upon to present the play before "the two universities of Cambridge and

[1] As "the fearful porpentine" altered to "the fretful porpentine."
[2] As "Very like, Stay'd it long?" altered to "Very like; very like. Stay'd it long?"

Oxford" — a very signal honor. Perhaps Gabriel Harvey, the famous humanistic scholar of Cambridge, witnessed one of these university performances, for in the margin of his copy of Chaucer he entered a note, written, it seems, before the play was published, to the effect that "the tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*," hath in it "to please the wiser sort." Further, the great stir that *Hamlet* made promptly started a vogue in tragedies of revenge. In 1602 Ben Jonson revised Kyd's *Hieronimo*, and Chettle wrote *Hoffman, or a Revenge for a Father*; in 1604 Chapman wrote *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*; about 1606, Tourneur wrote *The Atheist's Tragedy, or The Honest Man's Revenge*, as a reply to *Hamlet*, the author refusing to allow to a son the right to avenge his father; about 1607 an anonymous dramatist wrote *The Revenger's Tragedy*; and until the closing of the theaters in 1642 the revenge-type maintained its popularity on the stage.

The Pirated Quarto. Naturally the astonishing success of *Hamlet* would make the tragedy a desirable item for the publishers. But, of course, the actors were on the alert to prevent the theft of their new play. They kept the prompt-book under lock and key. To be sure, actors' parts were made for each member of the company having a share in the performance; but since an actor's part contained only the lines he was required to memorize, with the cue from the preceding speaker, and all actors' parts had promptly to be returned to the store-room, there seemed to be little danger of the play's getting into print. Yet that is exactly what happened. In 1603 two publishers, with reputations not of the best, issued a terribly mangled edition of the play, obviously stolen under adverse conditions, and giving a wretched notion of the subtle tragedy that had won high praise for its author.

Although some details remain doubtful, it is possible to

explain in general terms how this mangled text was secured.

One of the inferior "hirelings" of the troupe, having on previous occasions patched up defective versions of other of Shakespeare's plays (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*) and sold them to the greedy publishers, resolved to do the same thing with the dramatist's latest success. As a working basis he managed to secure the abbreviated traveling prompt-book — now discarded or carelessly guarded — of the play as it was before the recent revision. Then he set about converting this old text into something like Shakespeare's present text. Since he himself appeared in various scenes scattered throughout the play (apparently he had speaking parts as Marcellus, Voltimand, the Prologue and Lucianus in the Mouse-Trap, and parts without lines as one of the traveling troupe, the "player" who brought the recorder to Hamlet, one of the "attendants" at Ophelia's funeral, and one of the "ambassadors" from England) he was reasonably familiar with the larger part of the performance. He had learned by heart the lines he was required to utter. For the speeches of the other personages who appeared with him on the stage, he trusted to his ready but inaccurate memory. Moreover, while waiting his cue to enter, or lingering at the door after his exit, and at leisure moments following his hurried changes of costume, he could listen to the actors in other scenes and preserve in his memory or in surreptitious jottings [1] the more striking lines of their utterances.[2] All the material thus gathered he tried to work into the old text. So far as his own speaking parts went, he gave an accurate reproduction of what Shakespeare had written. But his efforts to incorporate into the older text ideas and phraseology imperfectly gleaned from overhearing the other actors often

[1] Compare III, II, 94–5: "Yfaith, the Camelion's dish, not capon cramm'd, feed a the air."

[2] It is interesting to note that the great Burbage, in the title rôle of Hamlet, left upon his mind the most indelible record.

produced sad results.[1] For some scenes his information was so deficient that he merely left the earlier text either entirely or for the most part unchanged. And, since he was working with an abbreviated copy, his reconstruction contained only 2143 lines as compared with 3719 in Shakespeare's full version.

The troupe must have detected him in his espionage — possibly in surreptitious note-taking — and must promptly have driven him from the theater. This would in part explain why the earlier half of his text is much closer to Shakespeare's revision than is the latter half; and it almost certainly explains the fact that the Globe Company never again suffered from this sort of piracy. Moreover, in order to prevent the disloyal hireling from selling his stolen text to a publisher, the actors hurried their printer friend, James Roberts (who printed all their play-bills) with the original manuscript to Stationers' Hall to copyright the tragedy. This is shown by the following entry in the records of the Stationers' Company: "July 26, 1602, James Roberts entered for his copy . . . a book called *The Revenge of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*." Roberts, of course, was taking this step, as he had done in other instances when the troupe feared piracy, merely on behalf of the players; for his "blocking-entry" would effectively prevent any other person from securing a license to issue the play.

In spite of this precaution, however, the actors were unable to foil the thief. He managed finally to sell his crudely manufactured text to two publishers who were unscrupulous enough to defy the laws of the Stationers' Company, and who, without securing a license, issued the play in May, 1603. This edition is referred to as the First or Pirated Quarto.

[3] Many words he heard incorrectly; hence we find "impudent" for "impotent," "related" for "delated," "Arganian" for "Hyrcanian." As these errors indicate, he was also an ignorant person; he writes "Plato" for "Plautus."

As might be inferred from the nature of its origin, the Pirated Quarto is a curious mixture of the Shakespearean and the pre-Shakespearean *Hamlets*. Only a reading of its strange text can give a clear notion of its composite character; all I can here do is to illustrate some of the earlier elements that the hireling, through carelessness or necessity, retained.

(1) The conception of the Queen in the latter half of the play is close to that of Belleforest and unlike that of Shakespeare. After her repentance, she is represented as taking an alert and active part in promoting her son's designs against the life of the villain. Hamlet says to her:

> And, mother, but assist me in my revenge,
> And in his death your infamy shall die.

To which she replies:

> I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
> What stratagem soe'er thou shalt devise.[1]

And in a later scene (not represented at all in Shakespeare's version), she frankly talks with Horatio about the villainous nature of her husband:

> There's treason in his looks
> That seem'd to sugar o'er his villainy;
> But I will soothe and please him for a time.

(2) In *Fratricide Punished*, it will be recalled, the ship bearing Hamlet to England was forced by adverse winds to stop at an island: "One day we had contrary [*contrarien*] winds, and we anchored at an island. . . . I went on shore with my two companions"; and, after killing the "two companions," Hamlet returned to Elsinore by land. The hireling-thief

[1] So in Kyd's *Hieronimo*, Belimperia says:

> Hieronimo, I will consent, conceal,
> And ought that may effect for thine avail
> Joyn with thee to revenge Horatio's death.

failed to eliminate all traces of this earlier version. According to his curiously confused text, the ship bearing Hamlet to England did not fall in with pirates at all, and Hamlet did not return to Denmark as their captive by sea; instead, his vessel "being crossed by contrary winds," cast anchor, and "he being set ashore" made his escape and returned to Denmark on land.

(3) In *Fratricide Punished* the fencing match was started fairly, with both combatants using foils; but later, as devised by the King, Laertes secured, while in the heat of the contest, an unbaited and envenomed rapier. A trace of this original plot appears in the Pirated Quarto. The King says to Laertes:

> When you are hot in midst of all your play,
> Among the foils shall a keen rapier lie
> Steeped in a mixture of poison.

(4) But the reader is perhaps most struck by the fact that the names of some of the characters are different from those now familiar in the accepted Shakespearean text. Polonius appears as Corambis, Reynaldo as Montano, Osric as A Braggart Gentleman, the Player-King and Player-Queen as a Duke and Duchess, Voltimand as Voltemar (a form preserved in *The Welsh Ambassador*), Rosencrantz as Rossencraft, and Guildenstern as Guilderstone.

(5) Finally, the sequence of certain scenes, different from that in Shakespeare, agrees exactly with that in *Fratricide Punished.*

The authorized version. Shakespeare must have been annoyed that the tragedy which had won him fame both in London and at the universities should be offered to critical readers in so mangled a form. Yet he had no recourse at law, and the only way in which he could repair the damage done to his reputation was to give to the press a correct ver-

sion. This, however, he did not at once do. The death of Elizabeth, and the arrival in London on May 7, 1603, of the new sovereign James, with the resultant distraction, and especially the outbreak of the plague, which on May 26 closed the theaters for more than half a year and drove the Chamberlain's — now the King's — Men into the country, forced him to delay action.

But after the troupe was again comfortably settled in London, he turned his attention to the matter. Fortunately he had preserved the old prompt-book which he had patched up, and without troubling to make a fresh transcript, he sent this to the printer. In glancing over the manuscript he may possibly have entered a few — but not many — alterations. He took the opportunity, however, to strike out the long attack on Jonson and the Children of Blackfriars, for the War of the Theaters was now over, he was on friendly terms with Jonson, and the King's Men were producing at the Globe Jonson's *Sejanus*. The play, issued late in 1604, was printed by James Roberts, the actors' friend who had made for them the blocking entry of 1602. The title-page stated that the text, "enlarged to almost as much again as it was," reproduced "the true and perfect copy."

An examination of Roberts' edition shows that the typesetter worked, as has been stated, from the old revamped prompt-book. We find unmistakable earmarks in the text that show the printer's manuscript to have been used in the theater; and other evidence, too voluminous to be cited, establishes beyond dispute the nature of the printer's "copy." [1] I may here content myself with a brief consideration of the names of the characters.

[1] The nature of the evidence may be illustrated by one line. In II, II, 73, the original text had: "Gives him three-score crowns in annual fee." Shakespeare wrote above the specified sum the word "thousand." When he came to transcribe he copied the line: "Gives him three thousand crowns in annual fee." But the typesetter of the 1604 Quarto, being confused, and slavishly following his copy at the expense of the meter, set the line thus: "Gives him three-score thousand crowns in annual fee."

Shakespeare changed the original "Corambis" to "Polonius"; in the stage-direction prefixed to Act I, Scene II, where the name first appears, the phrase "Counsaile: as Polonius" may be the typesetter's effort to make sense out of the word "Corambis" carelessly left under the tentatively substituted "Polonius." "Montano" was, in the text altered to "Reynaldo"; in the stage-direction prefixed to Act II, Scene I, the phrase "Polonius with his man or two" may be the typesetter's effort to make sense out of "Polonius with Montano." "Guilderstone" was changed to "Guildenstern"; yet in two places we find embedded in the text the half-altered form "Guilderstern." "Osric," who appears only in the last scene of the play, was designated in the Pirated Quarto merely as "A Braggart Gentleman"; Shakespeare, at the beginning of the scene, used the anonymous designation "A Courtier," but with the start of the fencing episode he devised for this character the name "Ostricke," and finally altered the name to "Osrick," the form he employed throughout in his transcript for the actors. The original name "Gertred" he kept almost unchanged as "Gertrad"; apparently when he copied the manuscript he further altered this to "Gertrude."

The Folio text. The "fair copy" transcribed by Shakespeare for the actors, bearing the formal license of the Master of the Revels, was converted into the official or "allowed" prompt-book, and kept in the store-room of the Globe. During the process of "casting" the play, the stage-manager, in consultation no doubt with the author, deleted some passages in order to bring the performance within the limited time. And during the subsequent years while the tragedy was being frequently revived, Shakespeare may occasionally have introduced slight changes in phraseology, or have added some new lines in order to emphasize certain points. In general, however, the text remained as he had originally transcribed it.

When in 1623 his actor-friends, Hemminge and Condell, issued all his plays in the First Folio, they delivered to the printers as "copy" for *Hamlet* this official prompt-book. The manuscript was obviously superior to the one given by the dramatist himself to the press in 1604; and, although it was somewhat scarred by the "cuts" of the stage-manager, it represented the play as it was performed at the Globe with Shakespeare's approval. Unfortunately the type-setter was careless, and introduced into the text a distressingly large number of errors; further, the publishers made some effort to edit the play for readers, and thus robbed us of valuable prompt-notations.

Since both the Authorized Quarto of 1604 and the Folio of 1623 have authority, and each gives variant readings and some material not found in the other, the modern editor is called upon to make a judicious selection and compilation from the two in an effort to establish the correct and full text. The Pirated Quarto, though occasionally it helps us in making the right choice of a word, is interesting mainly as a curiosity.[1]

[1] The success of Shakespeare's play led a hack writer — almost certainly George Wilkins — to translate for English readers the old story as told by Belleforest. This he published in 1608 with the title: *The Hystorie of Hamblet.* For the most part the author slavishly rendered the French original, but a few passages, and especially the added summaries prefixed to each chapter, unmistakably show an influence from the play. No further significance is to be attached to the work.

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